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US SOUNDS OF AMERICA

A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada

JS Bach

'Going Off Script -
The Ornamented Suites for Cello'
Six Solo Cello Suites, BWV1007-1012
Juliana Soltis *vc*
King Street ™ ③ 001 (164' • DDD)

JS Bach • Block

'Step into the Void'
JS Bach Six Solo Cello Suites, BWV1007-1012
Block Step into the Void^a
Mike Block *vc* ^aBarry Rothman *phonograph*
Bright Shiny Things ™ ③ BTSC0132 (151' • DDD)
^aRecorded live at Stubblebine Lutherie,
Somerville, MA



These releases' provocative titles suggest that Juliana Soltis and Mike Block are about to knock Bach's Cello Suites off their iconic pedestal. Not quite, although both musicians approach their respective Bach Cello Suite cycles from very different creative angles.

Soltis prefaces her set with a written warning/apologium about her 'ornamented cello suites', in the hope that no one will rescind her academic degrees. While the baroque cellist liberally doles out embellishments and cadenzas, her emendations fold into the scores comfortably and tastefully. It is in matters of rhythm, however, where Soltis's individual, iconoclastic and occasionally eccentric profile comes into play.

In Suite No 1's Prelude, for example, Soltis distends phrases with an unpredictable ebb and flow, where elongated bass notes represent harmonic signposts. At measure 31 she begins the *stretto* passage slowly, in the manner of a train embarking from a depot and gradually gaining speed.

Soltis's Allemandes project a melodically conversational discourse that work overtime to sidestep bar lines and accented down-beats. She also takes a less declamatory pose than most in No 3's

Prelude. In contrast to the suave timbral modulations that baroque cellists such as Ophélie Gaillard bring to the Sarabandes, Soltis breaks up the lines into moody mosaics, where low notes emit raspy mumbles and melodic peaks are threadbare yet oddly expressive. Think of late-period Marlon Brando or Billie Holiday and you'll understand Soltis's expressive game plan.

At times, Soltis falls victim to her creativity. She overloads the Bourées' embellishments and emphatic accents to the point where they distract from the music's buoyant charm. I also suspect that Soltis changes her articulation on nearly every downward pattern throughout No 4's Prelude because she can, rather than that she must. The same critique applies to the Gigue, which soon bogs down in detail after a promisingly supple start. I can imagine that some might find her audible breathing a distraction, although it didn't especially bother me. In the end, her serious musicianship and inquiring mind shed fascinating and often stimulating light on these works.

Mike Block's multifaceted, genre-bending artistry has graced Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble for years, not to mention a dizzying array of high-profile cross-stylistic collaborations. Yet he's long been grounded in Bach, and 'grounded' is the operative word regarding his interpretations. One immediately notices Block's smooth bowing and seamless integration of registers, along with his consistently spot-on intonation. Indeed, the selected movements that Block recorded for his 2018 solo release 'Echoes of Bach' (2/19^{US}) benefit from the cellist's further refinements and simplifications, although he now leaves out repeats.

Compare, for instance, the earlier, more self-consciously phrased G major Prelude and D minor Allemande to their more direct and understated counterparts here. Block also conveys a stronger sense of the music's dance origins than Soltis; in fact, I've rarely heard the Suite No 6 Prelude's earthy lilt unfold to Block's supple degree. At the same time, Block

is not averse to roughening up his tone for dramatic effect, as in Suite No 5's Courante.

However, I suspect that Block's fan base will prefer the third disc, which features six extended improvisations, each based on a respective Bach suite movement. Here Block lets down his creative guard, deftly free-associating jazz, pop, baroque and hip hop styles in cahoots with turntable maestro Barry Rothman. **Jed Distler**

Mozart

'Piano Concertos, Vol 1'
Piano Concertos - No 6, K238; No 13, K415
Anne-Marie McDermott *pf*
Odense Symphony Orchestra / Scott Yoo
Bridge © BRIDGE9518 (51' • DDD)



Whether or not this release's 'Vol 1' designation signifies the start of a Mozart

piano concerto cycle, it nevertheless showcases Anne-Marie McDermott's tasteful, stylish and poised approach to this composer. In fact, she previously recorded the C major Concerto, K415, for Bridge in the work's incarnation utilising solo strings (10/13^{US}). As such, I couldn't help but compare McDermott to herself. In the chamber recording, she takes a more expansive and vocally orientated view of the slow movement, which has become a tad faster and firmer with full orchestra. Her outer movements gain variety in articulation and tonal shading, as if to compensate for less rubato this time around. Scott Yoo and the Odense SO provide impeccable support, although the sonic concert-hall realism yields a generalised blend that differs from the immediacy and impact one hears in recordings by Murray Perahia and Rudolf Buchbinder (both Sony Classical).

Yet the opposite is true in the B flat Concerto. In the *Andante*, for example, listen to how Yoo balances the long violin lines against the cello pizzicatos while



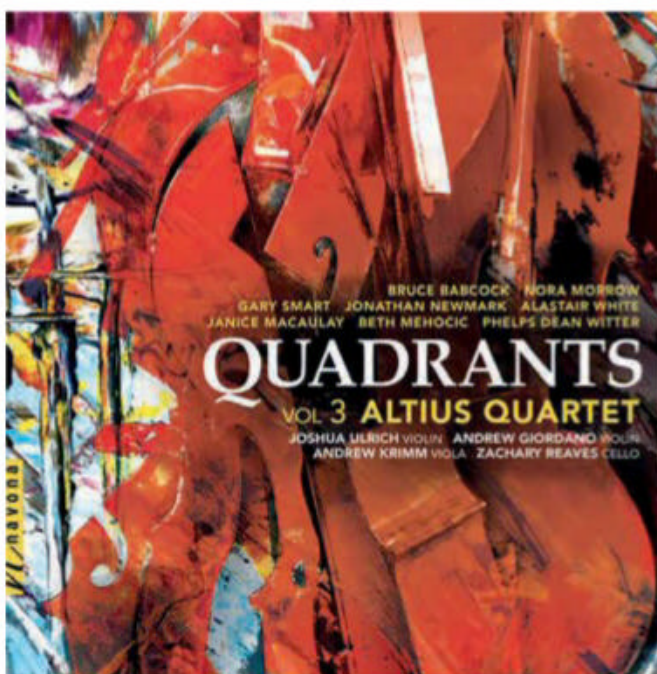
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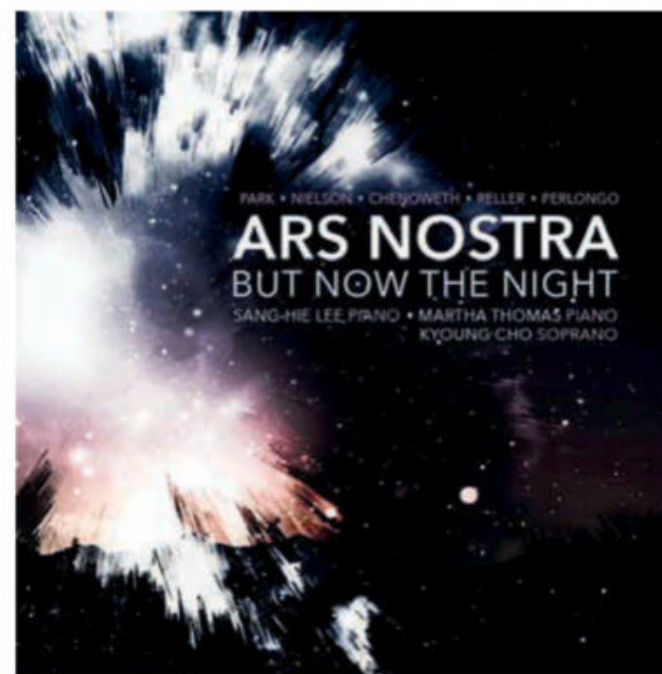
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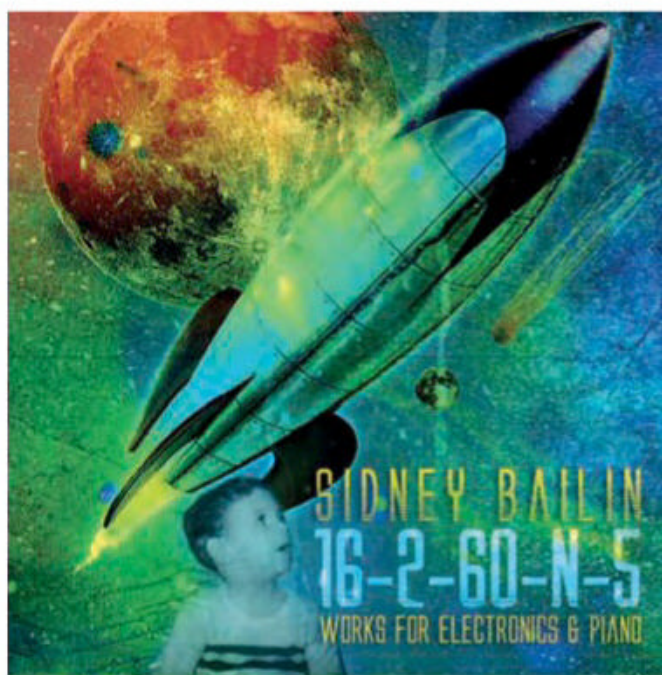
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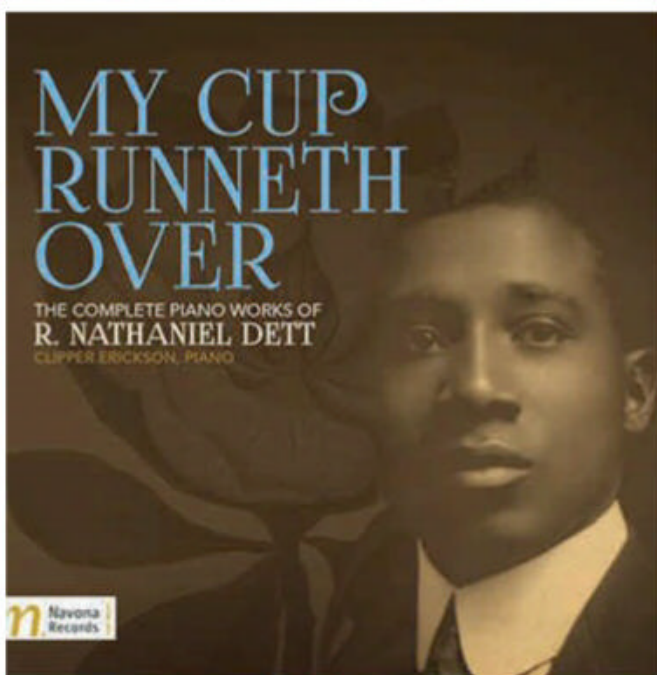
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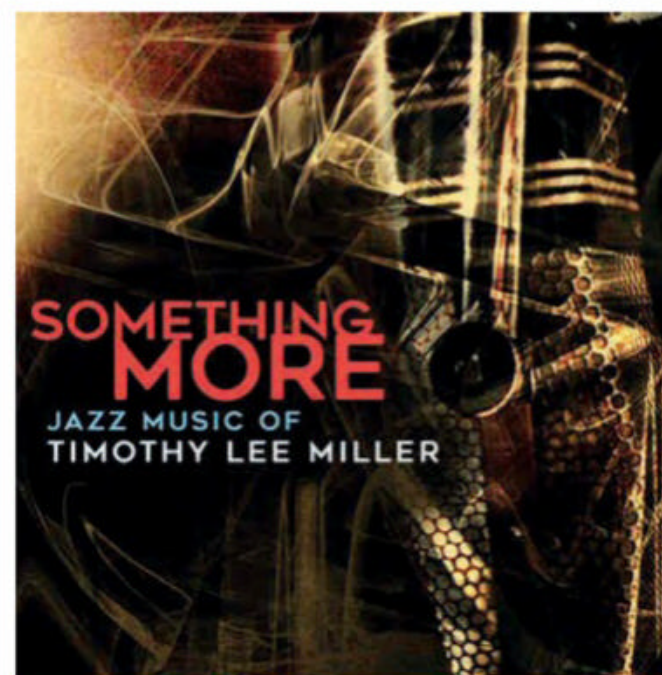
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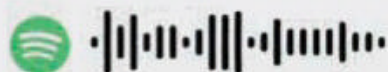
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Stylish and poised: Anne-Marie McDermott brings warmth to Mozart's piano concertos

giving the horns uncommon prominence. In turn, McDermott conjures up her own textural allure as her right hand *cantabiles* float over the bars, while uncovering inner melodies in the steady left-hand figurations. In contrast to Alfred Brendel's impetuous angularity in the Rondeau finale (Decca), McDermott seemingly throws phrases away while being well attuned to her surroundings in good chamber-like fashion. Her *détaché* articulation in the opening *Allegro aperto* conveys a warmth and roundness that never turns brittle. Catalogue competition is fierce, of course, yet a musician and pianist of McDermott's distinctive calibre deserves to be documented as her label sees fit. **Jed Distler**

Reale

'Stroke of Midnight - Piano Music'
Piano Sonatas - No 5; No 10, 'Sonata Piazzollana';
No 12, 'Stroke of Midnight'. Beethoven for the
Brain Dead. Chocolate Soccer Ball. Concert
Étude No 2

John Jensen *pf*

Naxos American Classics © 8 559879 (74' • DDD)



The composer's booklet note (written in spring last year) here opens in melancholic mood, with the news that he had, at that point, one year left to live. It is the backdrop to the title work, the Twelfth (and, I presume, last) Piano Sonata (2019), a dark and sombre piece in three movements: 'Dusk', 'Nightfall' – partly reworking material from his Third and Fourth Piano Concertos – and 'Midnight'. All are dominated by the sound of a clock chiming. Reale characterises it as 'harsh reality and a confrontation with mortality' and it makes for a forbidding listen. At time of writing, more happily, Reale is still with us.

His piano style is not unlike, at several removes, that of Harold Truscott (10 of whose sonatas have recently been reissued – Heritage, 2/20). They share a directness of utterance that can at

times seem ungainly. Where the British composer relied on Beethoven as the bedrock of his music, Reale repurposes popular genres for the underscoring for his sonatas, jazz vibrantly in the large-scale Fifth (1988-89, given in its 2019 revision). The composer's whimsical story of indirectly requited love may or may not be a help to its appreciation; this is not programme music.

Neither is the Tenth, *Sonata Piazzollana* (2010, also rev 2019), despite its references to the great Argentine tango master and his teacher, Ginastera, in its first movement. It is also not a 'tango sonata'; rather a homage to kindred spirits. *Chocolate Soccer Ball* was written in 2018 as an encore to the as-then-unrevised Sonata and a response to constraints arising from his illness; like *Concert Étude No 2* (2008) it features here as textural relief between the larger sonatas. John Jensen, who has premiered and recorded many of Reale's piano works, performs them here with enviable clarity and understanding.

Guy Rickards

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'Brahmsiana'

Brahms Piano Pieces – Op 117; Op 118 Chumbley

Brahmsiana II Cziner Echoes of Youth

Steven Masi *pf*

Navona © NV6260 (78' • DDD)



There have been many fine recordings of Brahms's Op 117 and 118 in recent

years: Barry Douglas and Jonathan Plowright (within their complete surveys on Chandos and BIS respectively), Sarah Beth Briggs (Avie), Arcadi Volodos (Sony), Garrick Ohlsson (Hyperion) and most recently Stephen Hough, whose Hyperion recording was Recording of the Month in January. Any new recording must be measured against such benchmarks.

Steven Masi's accounts of these alternately wistful, dark and serene not-so-miniatures are nicely played as far as they go but not the equal of the best of rivals. His account of Op 117 is far too slow in all three Intermezzos, running on at least a minute past Volodos in No 1 but without the Russian's exquisite touch. Masi can play with fire when he needs to but in No 3 sounds laboured compared to Volodos, Plowright or Douglas, who bring playing of greater depth to the keyboard. Briggs, too, performs both sets with more conviction and élan, though I prefer Masi to Ohlsson's rather disappointing accounts overall.

But the Brahms sets are not the only focus here; rather, they are the enablers for two works a century or more on. Robert Chumbley's triptych *Brahmsiana II* (the first is an orchestral ballet) looks to

Op 117 for its air of nostalgia – but not material, there are no quotes – in a substantial and very nicely worked homage. Jonathan Cziner's *Echoes of Youth* was commissioned by Masi expressly as a companion to Op 118 and its four movements complement it rather well in setting a wider musical frame of reference. In fact, the whole disc creates a very workable, and listenable, context for the music it contains. Navona's sound is a touch airless, but this is an intelligently planned programme, intelligently played.

Guy Rickards

Brahms – selected comparisons:

Plowright (12/14) (BIS) BIS-CD2117

Volodos (6/17) (SONY) 88875 13019-2

Ohlsson (1/19) (HYPERION) CDA68226

Briggs (3/19) (AVIE) AV2398

Hough (1/20) (HYPERION) CDA68116

Douglas (CHAN) CHAN10951

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Our monthly guide to North American venues

Year opened 1974

Architect Hugh Hardy

Capacity 2085 seats; Target Atrium: 250 seats

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You could call Minneapolis's Orchestra Hall 'the house that Stan built'. Stanisław Skrowaczewski, music director of the Minneapolis Symphony-cum-Minnesota Orchestra from 1960 to 1979, long lamented the acoustics of Northrop Auditorium, the orchestra's home since 1930. His persistent lobbying of potential funders eventually resulted in Orchestra Hall opening near the south end of downtown Minneapolis in 1974.

With the assistance of acoustician Cyril Harris, it proved a profound improvement, the sound splendid throughout the hall. It also bore a distinctive visual element: over 100 white cubes protrude from its ceiling and cascade down the wall behind the orchestra like blocks tumbling from a toy box. Irregular in size, they're akin to a modern art installation that shapes the sound arriving at audience members' ears.

Yet Orchestra Hall's sightlines are a mixed bag. Much of the gradually raked main floor sits below stage level, obscuring many musicians from view. The visuals are better in the three storeys of wrap-around balconies, especially at the rear of the house. But the side-balcony seating is all in closely clustered armchairs that inspire much craning of necks.

A renovation took place while management locked out the orchestra's musicians in a contract dispute from October 2012 to January 2014. This strained negotiations even further, as the orchestra's board spoke of pay cuts and financial scarcity while overseeing a \$52-million renovation, a public-private partnership to which Minnesota's taxpayers contributed \$14 million in bonds.

But the results of the refurbishment by Toronto-based KPMB Architects have been almost universally praised.



What was once a bit of a brutalist brick is now a far glassier structure. Thanks to tiered lobbies outside the lower two balconies, there's twice as much room to mill about in during intermission and gaze at sprawling views of the Minneapolis skyline, including from a woody, west-facing outdoor terrace. Also roughly doubled in the renovation was the number of restroom fixtures.

On the building's west end is the Target Atrium, which sits across the pedestrian-friendly Nicollet Mall from the corporate headquarters of the retailer whose name it bears. An open room with a gas fireplace, its windows look (and open) on to Peavey Plaza, a multi-tiered park of stone, concrete and below-street-level fountains that flow from spring into autumn. Target Atrium is the home of pre-concert talks, as well as performances of chamber music by orchestra musicians and jazz from local players.

During the orchestra's annual Sommerfest concerts, Peavey Plaza hosts outdoor pre- and post-concert performances at the base of a sunken amphitheatre, surrounded by food and drink vendors. Thus, concert-goers can extend their visit with more music while enjoying one of those beautiful Minnesota summer nights that make up for the discomforts of its cold, snowy winters.

Rob Hubbard

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Artur Pizarro performs Poulenc's Piano Concerto with the Bamberger Symphoniker directed by Thomas Rösner, alongside Poulenc's Sinfonietta and two rare, glittering gems by Koechlin.

Following the success of Artur Pizarro's complete Rachmaninoff recordings on Odradek, hailed in Gramophone Magazine as "courageous and poetic", the Portuguese pianist returns with Poulenc's jaunty Piano Concerto. The album also features Poulenc's colourful *Sinfonietta* and two Koechlin tone poems, of which *Sur les flots lointains* uses a melody by American composer Catherine Murphy Urner.

The Bamberger Symphoniker was lauded for its BBC Proms 2019 performance: "stunning... idiomatic, impassioned, blazing with energy and power..." (The Times). This release is a coproduction with Bayerischer Rundfunk.



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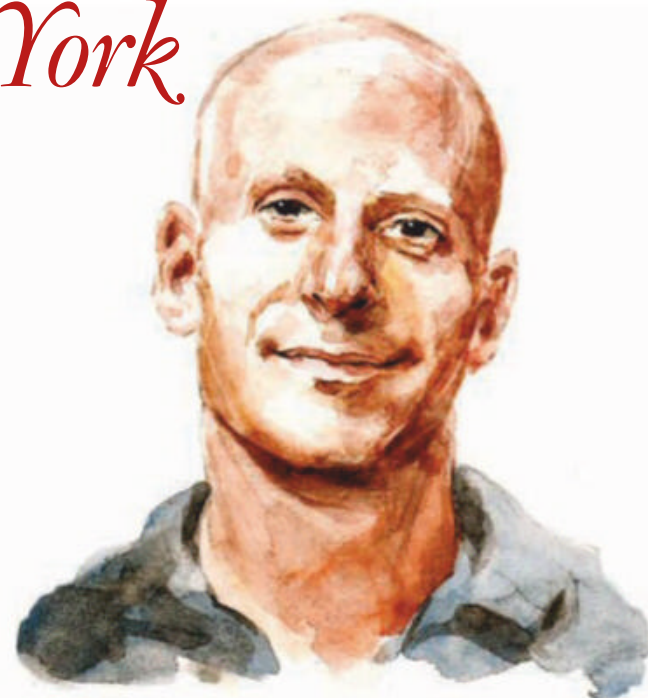


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A LETTER FROM *New York*

Andrew Farach-Colton reflects on some recent musical encounters in his home city, including Teodor Currentzis and Leila Josefowicz



In 2009 the first section of the High Line opened, transforming a long-abandoned elevated railroad spur on the West Side of Manhattan into a narrow but inviting urban greenspace perched between the Hudson River and the city. The ensuing building boom included a new home for the Whitney Museum, and as further segments of the walkway were unveiled, construction followed. The culmination is Hudson Yards, situated at the High Line's northern end – a massive complex of towering residential and office buildings, restaurants, an upmarket mall, Thomas Heatherwick's permanent art installation known as *The Vessel* (a 16-storey, honeycomb-like system of stairways), and an arts centre aptly called The Shed. Like *The Vessel*, The Shed is a striking structure when seen from the High Line. Under its quilted, white, covered-wagon-like exterior lie gallery space and a 500-seat theatre, and when the shell is expanded (via gantry crane technology) it creates The McCourt, a capacious 1200-seat concert hall.

Under the artistic direction of Edinburgh-born Alex Poots – who formerly served in the same capacity for the Park Avenue Armory (another expansive performance space) – The Shed's programming crosses genres and favours the interdisciplinary. I made my first visit in mid-November for the final offering of The Shed's inaugural season: Teodor Currentzis and his musicAeterna orchestra and chorus performing Verdi's Requiem in their North American debut. This being The Shed, however, the performance included a specially commissioned video component by Jonas Mekas, a doyen of the city's downtown art scene who passed away in January 2019 at the age of 96.

Musically speaking, the performance was superb. The musicAeterna orchestra and chorus followed Currentzis's every dramatic gesture as if it were second nature. (I wonder how many hours of rehearsal had been required to secure such flexibility and precision.) The four vocal soloists, while not seamlessly matched, were all fresh-toned, fervent and spot-on in their intonation. Knowing the conductor only through his recordings, the whispered *pianissimos* and thunderous *fortissimos* came as no surprise, as I was expecting him to emphasise the work's dramatic extremes. What did surprise me was the smoothly sculpted texture of his interpretation, and how coolly he manipulated his forces. I'd imagined him working at white heat, like Bernstein, seeming to

feel everything he radiates; in reality, though, he is more like the eye of the storm.

Verdi's Requiem was a clever choice for The McCourt, as it has something of a cathedral's diffuse acoustic. Still, I don't believe it's a good place to hear classical music. Even with discreet amplification, I felt the sound was holding the music at arm's length. And then there's the space itself. Like the Park Avenue Armory's Drill Hall, one sits on steeply raked risers and what might be described as deluxe folding chairs. I was sitting near the rear of the middle section, and had a clear view of the stage.

There did seem to be some unevenness in the width of the rows, however, as the people behind me had to sit at odd angles to accommodate their knees.

The less said about Mekas's video portion, the better. His grainy images of urban and suburban flora (mostly potted), interspersed with the occasional clip of a fire or starving children, trivialised Verdi's score. By the *Offertorium*, I was using my hands as a visor so I could watch the performers without the distraction of the two giant video screens.

A few days later, I made my way to the Park Avenue Armory for a recital by the violinist Leila Josefowicz and pianist John Novacek. There are some lovely places to hear chamber music in New York. Alice Tully Hall, home of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, is too large for my taste. Zankel Hall (downstairs from Carnegie's main auditorium) has the same capacity as London's Wigmore, and Weill Recital Hall (upstairs) is even more cosy. Moving off the beaten path, the Frick Collection presents a thoughtfully curated series in a gallery hung with tapestries. And the Armory, while best known for the monumental productions it presents in the aforementioned 55,000 square-foot Drill Hall, also offers concerts in its intimate, wood-panelled Board of Officers Room. It had been some years since I'd had the opportunity to hear Josefowicz at such close range and appreciate the tonal variety and fierce emotional commitment she brings to everything she plays. There was wildness and wistfulness in her and Novacek's performance of Stravinsky's *Duo concertante*, and the *Perpetuum mobile* finale of Ravel's Sonata was thrilling, played as if in a single breath. But the highlight for me was a searing, appropriately unsettled account of the Janáček Sonata that, in retrospect, felt closer to a communion than the Requiem. **G**

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Pictured: Violinist Janine Jansen (DECCA / © Marco Borggreve) who featured on the January 2016 cover of Gramophone. Full annual retail price for print only (13 issues) is \$142.87; print only annual subscription or Digital Edition or Reviews Database (\$101); Digital Club (\$134); Gramophone Club (\$167). If choosing a print option, an addition overseas P+P charge will be added at \$35.75 (Outside EU). If you have a subscription enquiry then please email subscriptions@markallengroup.com

Exploring what it means to be a conductor

Handy terms can often serve well as useful shorthand, while rarely reflecting the diversity of what they describe. An 'orchestra' can run the gamut from grand symphonic to a period ensemble. The term 'classical music' is highly problematic in itself – exactly how medieval chant, Mahler symphonies and contemporary opera relate to each other I shall leave to musicologists to discuss. But what about 'conductor'? To many in the wider world it conjures a very specific image, probably a man in tails, on a podium, brandishing a baton. Of course such a definition is far too narrow – early music conductors (men *and* women) standing behind their harpsichords are as far removed from the above image as is a cassock-wearing cathedral choirmaster. Yet even where we do mean that more traditional type of symphonic conductor, looking below the surface can still reveal a rich diversity of what they do.

By 'what they do' I'm less concerned here with the process of performing music (we've explored that before, and I'm quite sure will do so again), but about how a conductor leads a group of fellow musicians, and in many ways a wider organisation, and how they relate that shared endeavour to the world around them. This month our three main interviews delve in-depth into that question. We didn't actually set out to plan such a study of the nature of conducting – each article was arranged independently, at different times, based on a story we simply wanted to explore. But taken together, that's precisely what they do.

Teodor Currentzis is a rather radical figure, whose albums (which I've hugely admired) have



generated just as much criticism as praise. But in Peter Quantrill's fascinating feature we meet an uncompromising artist who has founded and shaped an ensemble in his own image, and whose total devotion to the process of recording should win him renewed respect among readers of *Gramophone*.

Michael Tilson Thomas, by contrast, took on a major league ensemble with an existing heritage and organisational structure. That can always pose a risk of resting on laurels, but MTT, as he's long been more succinctly known, instead used this privileged foundation to shape, over a quarter century, an orchestra committed to exploring exactly what its relationship to local audiences, future audiences, and listeners worldwide could and should be, as San Francisco-based writer Steven Winn reports.

And then an insight into the sort of orchestra which can sometimes be the most rewarding of all: one not based in a major metropolis, and which can therefore take nothing for granted by way of status. Such ensembles can be true musical beacons, and command a passionate loyalty from their supporters. Jakub Hrůša's distinctive approach to the Bamberg Symphony has clearly struck a chord: according to Neil Fisher's article, concerts are a staggering 97.5 per cent sold. That speaks volumes.

Three conductors, three very different orchestras, and three thought-provoking portraits of what a maestro means to their musicians and audiences. I hope these articles enrich your enjoyment of their music-making which is, after all, what matters most of all.

martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'What began as a teatime interview ended as a late-night discourse on sex, God and Toscanini,' writes our cover story

author **PETER QUANTRILL** of his interview with Teodor Currentzis, conductor and so-called bad boy of classical music. 'But then anyone who's been beaten to a pulp on a film set has a good story to tell.'



'Travelling to Bamberg in northern Bavaria can feel a little like going back hundreds of years in time.

The Bamberg Symphony Orchestra is inspired by its historic home, but this ensemble's roots are actually a lot more complicated,' says **NEIL FISHER**. 'Unpicking the story was satisfying and rather poignant.'



'Like his mentor Leonard Bernstein, Michael Tilson Thomas excites, informs and engages

whenever and wherever he's speaking about music,' writes **STEVEN WINN**. 'Spending a few hours with him, in a frank and forthcoming conversation, confirmed those rare gifts.'

THE REVIEWERS Andrew Achenbach • Nalen Anthoni • Tim Ashley • Mike Ashman • Michelle Assay
Richard Bratby • Edward Breen • Liam Cagney • Alexandra Coghlan • Rob Cowan (consultant reviewer)
Jeremy Dibble • Peter Dickinson • Jed Distler • Adrian Edwards • Richard Fairman • David Fallows
David Fanning • Andrew Farach-Colton • Iain Fenlon • Neil Fisher • Fabrice Fitch • Jonathan Freeman-Attwood
Charlotte Gardner • David Gutman • Christian Hoskins • Lindsay Kemp • Philip Kennicott • Richard Lawrence
Andrew Mellor • Ivan Moody • Bryce Morrison • Hannah Nepilova • Jeremy Nicholas • Christopher Nickol
Geoffrey Norris • Richard Osborne • Stephen Plaistow • Mark Pullinger • Peter Quantrill • Guy Rickards
Malcolm Riley • Marc Rochester • Patrick Rucker • Edward Seckerson • Mark Seow • Hugo Shirley • Pwyll ap Siôn
Harriet Smith • David Patrick Stearns • David Threasher • David Vickers • John Warrack • Richard Whitehouse
Arnold Whittall • Richard Wigmore • William Yeoman

Gramophone, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is *the* magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

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Teodor Currentzis

"The world's most exciting conductor" – The Times

Coming soon...

Beethoven's monumental 5th & 7th Symphonies

**Conducted by Teodor Currentzis
with musicAeterna**

*"...playing of an intensity that makes the
music seem somehow Beethoven-plus;
more Beethoven than ever before."*

The Guardian on Currentzis/Beethoven – BBC Proms

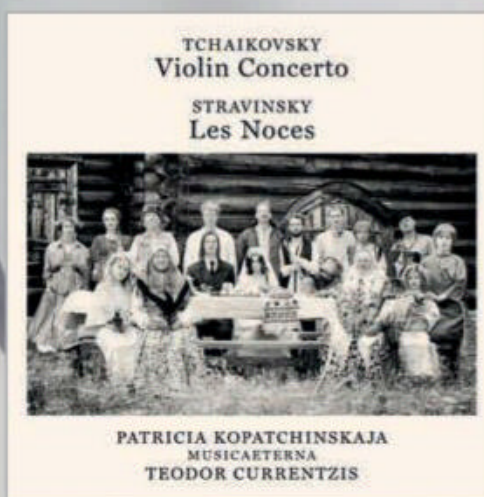
Also Available

19075822952



Mahler
Symphony No. 6

88875190402



Tchaikovsky
Violin Concerto, Op. 35 –
Stravinsky: Les Noces
with Patricia Kopatchinskaja

88985404352



Tchaikovsky
Symphony No. 6

Jonas Kaufmann

"The world's greatest tenor" – The Daily Telegraph



Verdi: Otello

"...the great Otello for this generation of opera lovers..."

City AM on Kaufmann/Otello – Royal Opera House

Out 27 March

Also Available



Wien

"There is so much to savour here..."
Gramophone



L'Opéra

"Kaufmann's tenor is duskily beautiful, his dynamic control exceptional..."
Gramophone



Dolce Vita

"...his singing smoulders with lustrous tone..."
Financial Times

Isabelle Faust



WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART
Sonatas for fortepiano & violin Vol. 2
 KV 301, 305, 376 & 378
 Alexander Melnikov
 CD HMM 902361



ARNOLD SCHOENBERG
Violin Concerto
Verklärte Nacht
 Schreiber - Tamestit - Waskiewicz
 Queyras - Poltéra
 Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra
 Daniel Harding
 CD HMM 902341

GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews



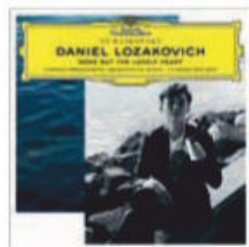
RECORDING OF THE MONTH



CHOPIN

Piano Concertos
Benjamin Grosvenor
pf Royal Scottish
National Orchestra /
Elim Chan
Decca
► **HARRIET SMITH'S
REVIEW IS ON
PAGE 32**

The brilliant Benjamin Grosvenor brings poetry and beautifully flowing virtuosity to these concertos, aided by superb and instinctive orchestral support courtesy of conductor Elim Chan.



TCHAIKOVSKY

Violin Concerto, etc
Daniel Lozakovich vn
National Philharmonic
Orchestra of Russia /
Vladimir Spivakov
DG

Daniel Lozakovich plays this repertoire with truly distinctive personality. A second triumphant DG disc for the young violinist.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 46**



DVOŘÁK

String
Quartets Nos 8 & 10
Albion Quartet
Signum
When a critic

concludes a review, in March, with 'I can already see this being my pick of the year', you really do *have* to listen for yourselves. Detail and collegiality throughout make for a superb album.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 55**



LITOLFF

Piano Trios
Nos 1 & 2. Serenade
Leonore Piano Trio
Hyperion
If you ever need

persuading to explore the lesser-known byways of the chamber repertoire, let this album do so: engaging music, played with striking advocacy from the outset, and beautifully recorded.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 56**



MOZART

Violin Sonatas, Vol 2
Isabelle Faust vn
Alexander Melnikov fp
Harmonia Mundi
While the catalogue

boasts several inspired collaborations in this repertoire, forming here is another exquisite series from two key members of Harmonia Mundi's formidable artist family.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 56**



'CANADIAN ORGAN MUSIC'

Rachel Mahon org
Delphian
The Canadian organist Rachel

Mahon offers thrilling advocacy for her country's music, on a British instrument – Coventry Cathedral's magnificent Harrison and Harrison organ – she knows expertly.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 66**



'#CELLOUNLIMITED'

Daniel Müller-Schott vc
Orfeo
To experience Daniel Müller-Schott's intimate and

instinctive understanding of the cello's sound world throughout this wide variety of unaccompanied works is a completely compelling musical journey.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 66**



JS BACH

St John Passion
Collegium Vocale Gent /
Philippe Herreweghe
PHI
More than three

decades on from his first of three recordings of the *St John Passion*, Philippe Herreweghe offers an affecting new interpretation, clearly drawing on a lifetime of reflection.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 72**



'PASSIONS'

Les Cris de Paris /
Geoffroy Jourdain
Harmonia Mundi
Powerful and

haunting, this programme of Venetian early Baroque music from Les Cris de Paris, built around five settings of the *Crucifixus*, is every bit as riveting as it is moving.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 84**



HANDEL

Agrippina Sols; Il Pomo d'Oro /
Maxim Emelyanychev
Erato
Maxim Emelyanychev

continues to build his incredibly impressive catalogue with a performance which our critic Richard Wigmore now defines as his first choice for this Venetian masterpiece.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 89**



DVD/BLU-RAY

VERDI Rigoletto
Sols; Vienna SO / **Enrique Mazzola**
C Major Entertainment

The often jaw-dropping drama of Bregenz Festival's floating stage-sets generally makes for a striking visual feast: a great performance makes this a treat for the ears too.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 93**



REISSUE/ARCHIVE

BEETHOVEN

Busch Quartet
Pristine Audio

A vintage Beethoven recording from the famed Busch Quartet which will make a memorable contribution to your listening as we continue our celebration of Beethoven's 250th anniversary.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 103**

FOR THE RECORD

Remembering the horn soloist Barry Tuckwell

Barry Tuckwell, one of the most admired and successful of 20th-century horn players, died in January, aged 88.

Born in Australia, after a musical childhood as a chorister and learning – to his mind unsatisfactorily – piano and violin, Tuckwell began playing the horn aged 13, describing it as ‘a love affair from the start’. Within two years he was playing professionally, having been appointed, aged just 15, as third horn in the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. A year later he joined the Sydney Symphony Orchestra under Eugene Goossens, leaving three years later for the UK. He played for two years in the Hallé under Sir John Barbirolli, and after spells in the Scottish National and the Bournemouth Symphony orchestras, in 1955 he was appointed first horn at the London Symphony Orchestra. Remaining for 13 years, he spent six of those as Chairman of the LSO’s Board.

In 1968 Tuckwell decided to focus exclusively on a career as a soloist – still a far from common path for a horn player, but one he



Barry Tuckwell: a much-admired horn player

carried off with great success. His combination of extraordinary virtuosity and warmth of sound proved a source of inspiration for several leading composers, with Oliver Knussen, Robin Holloway, Thea Musgrave and Richard Rodney Bennett among those who wrote works for him. His discography of more than 50 recordings includes the concertos by Mozart and Richard Strauss, as well as the Brahms Horn Trio with Itzhak Perlman and Vladimir Ashkenazy. He also conducted, becoming the founding conductor of the Maryland SO in 1982, and serving as Chief Conductor of the Tasmanian SO. He also taught widely. He retired, aged 65, in 1997. Tuckwell had been appointed OBE in 1965. In 2005, when *Gramophone* asked leading horn players to nominate which contemporary or forebear they most revered, Tuckwell was the choice

of LSO Principal David Pyatt, and also of Anthony Halstead who said: ‘For sheer, heroic nobility of tone, he was unequalled’.
Barry Tuckwell: Born March 5, 1931; died January 16, 2020

Kanneh-Mason makes Top 10

Cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason became the first cellist in the history of the UK Official Album Chart to break into the Top 10, and the first British classical instrumentalist in 30 years, with his new Decca album. It features a performance of Elgar’s Cello Concerto which, in the February issue of *Gramophone*, Rob Cowan said ‘shines resplendent even against a backdrop of celebrity rivals ... It really is a remarkable performance’.

Gilbert’s new Swedish post

Alan Gilbert has been named Music Director of the Royal Swedish Opera from 2021, a return to Stockholm for the former Chief Conductor of the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra (and current Chief Conductor of Hamburg’s NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra). ‘It is of course particularly meaningful for me to be coming back to such a musically vibrant situation in my adopted hometown,’ said the American maestro.

Violinist Vengerov streams

Famed virtuoso Maxim Vengerov has formed a partnership with music streaming service Idagio to release, exclusively on the subscription-based service, his new recording of Tchaikovsky’s Violin Concerto, with Myung-Whun Chung and the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France. It will be followed by a recorded recital from Carnegie Hall.

Detroit names its new MD

The Detroit Symphony Orchestra has named the 43-year old Italian conductor Jader Bignamini as its new Music Director. His six-year contract begins at the start of the 2020-21 season. He succeeds Leonard Slatkin, who stepped down in 2018 and is now the Conductor Laureate.

Make it a Mozartian spring with seven free-to-view operas

Roll over, Beethoven, Mozart is the man at Operavision this spring. During March and April you can watch seven productions, including La Monnaie’s new Da Ponte trilogy directed by Jean-Philippe Clarac and Olivier Deloëuil, and conducted by Antonello Manacorda (*Don Giovanni* on March 19, *Le nozze di Figaro* on March 21 and *Così fan tutte* on March 24). Before that, though, you can enjoy another *Don Giovanni* from Finnish National Opera and Ballet (March 11).

In April *La clemenza di Tito* comes courtesy of Bergen National Opera (April 3) in a production by Rodula Gaitanou, followed by Glyndebourne’s *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (April 10: Sir David McVicar’s 2015 production with Robin Ticciati conducting – pictured above) and the Mozart Festival closes with *Il sogno di Scipione* filmed at La Fenice in Venice in a production by Elena Barbalich (April 17).

As usual with Operavision, all performances will stay on the site for six months, and are free to view. For more information and to watch, visit [operavision.eu](https://www.operavision.eu)



Ashkenazy retires after golden career

Vladimir Ashkenazy, one of the most acclaimed of modern recording artists, retired from public performances in January. His first mention in our pages was in April 1957, Harold C Schonberg welcoming his album of Chopin's Piano Concerto No 2 plus some solo works, recorded in Warsaw in 1955: 'If he played this way at 17, what will he do in ten years? For this is one of the most extraordinary potentials I have ever heard.' Across more than a half century, his hundreds of albums ranged from the complete Beethoven sonatas as pianist to the complete Sibelius symphonies as conductor.

Ashkenazy's fame was assured from the moment when, in 1962, he shared First Prize in the Tchaikovsky Competition with John Ogdon. The following year he began a relationship with Decca that was



Vladimir Ashkenazy enjoyed a long career

to be celebrated with a 50th-anniversary boxed set in 2013, a set that included such Ashkenazy classics as the complete piano concertos of Rachmaninov and Prokofiev (with Previn conducting), his set of the Beethoven violin sonatas with Itzhak Perlman, and the three Rachmaninov symphonies with the

Concertgebouw Orchestra. His two *Gramophone* Awards, however, came in the solo vocal categories: Sibelius songs with Tom Krause and Elisabeth Söderström (1985) and an album of Russian Songs, again with Söderström (1979). Orchestral posts, meanwhile, included Principal Conductor of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Czech Philharmonic and the NHK Symphony Orchestra, Chief Conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, and Music Director of the European Union Youth Orchestra.

ONE TO WATCH

Petr Někora Tenor

Young Czech tenor Petr Někora has, since September 2018, been honing his skills as a soloist at Oper Stuttgart, where roles have included Almaviva (*The Barber of Seville*), Ramiro (*La cenerentola*), and Ernesto (*Don Pasquale*). This followed two years on the prestigious Lindemann Program for Young Artists at the Metropolitan Opera - the first Czech to have been accepted on the scheme, and first place plus the Plácido Domingo prize in Barcelona's International Competition of Francesco Viñas. And while stepping in for an indisposed star features on many artists' early CVs, in Někora's case it was for Stephen Costello at the opening concert of the Met's Summer Recital Series.

But it's to his new album of French arias, on Supraphon, that we can now turn. His repertoire may be dominated by Italian *bel canto*, but he chose French repertoire because, he tells us: 'First and foremost, it is very close to my heart. Yet I cannot tell why.' There's no arguing with that, and it certainly suits his light, lyrical tenor well. Arias from *Werther*, *Roméo et Juliette* and *Faust* showcase the diversity of his



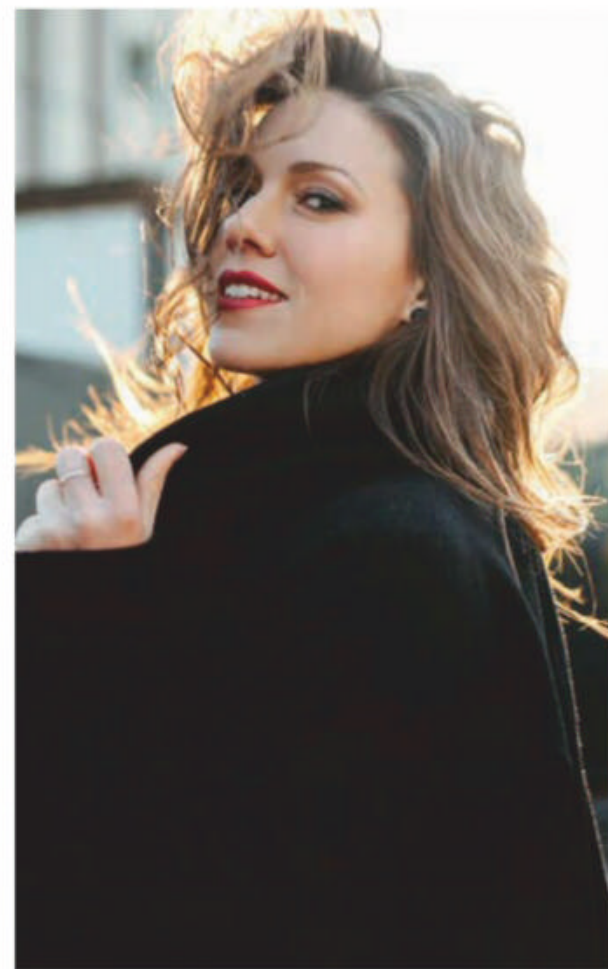
talent, particularly well demonstrated in two contrasting consecutive tracks midway through: the flamboyant virtuosity (including nine high Cs) required of 'Ah! Mes amis, quel jour de fête!' from *La fille du régiment*, followed by the tender poignancy of 'Je crois entendre encore' from Bizet's *The Pearl Fishers*. It was recorded with the Czech Philharmonic, conducted by Christopher Franklin, and will be reviewed in the next issue of *Gramophone*.

GRAMOPHONE *Online*

The magazine is just the beginning. Visit gramophone.co.uk for ...

Podcasts

The *Gramophone* podcast series continues with entertaining encounters with soprano Mary Bevan and conductor/composer José Serebrier. Joined by the pianist Joseph Middleton, Bevan's new album for Signum Classics, 'The Divine Muse', features songs by Franz Schubert and Hugo Wolf, and at its heart, Joseph Haydn's scena *Arianna a Naxos*. James Jolly met up with Bevan to talk



Mary Bevan appears on the Gramophone podcast

about the album, but also how she balances the very different demands of song, concert work and opera.

José Serebrier's new recording for BIS contains two works specially commissioned from him for the pianist Alexandre Kantorow and the flautist Sharon Bezaly, alongside a group of shorter works for orchestra. James Jolly talks to Serebrier about his music, and how he approaches composition and conducting his own music.

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MARCH RELEASES

HYBRID SUPER AUDIO CD IN SURROUND SOUND



RECORDING OF THE MONTH

PARRY

JUDITH

Soloists | Children's Chorus | Crouch End Festival Chorus | London Mozart Players | William Vann

William Vann and his forces give the world premiere recording of Parry's oratorio, recorded following the first London performance for over 130 years.

CHSA 5268(2)



MOZART

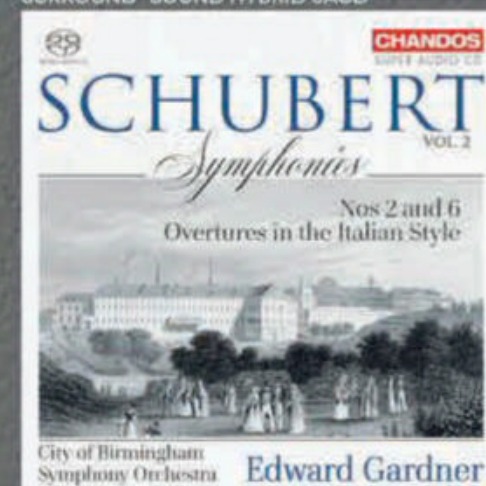
PIANO CONCERTOS, VOL. 5

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet | Manchester Camerata | Gábor Takács-Nagy

For this eagerly anticipated instalment, Piano Concertos Nos 5, 6, 8, and 9 are complemented by the overtures to *Il sogno di Scipione*, *Lucio Silla*, *Il re pastore*, *Zaide*, and *La finta giardiniera*.

CHAN 20137(2)

SURROUND-SOUND HYBRID SACD



SCHUBERT

SYMPHONIES, VOL. 2

City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra | Edward Gardner

Edward Gardner and the CBSO give dazzling performances of Symphonies Nos 2 and 6, adding the two Overtures 'In the Italian style', in C major and D major.

CHSA 5245



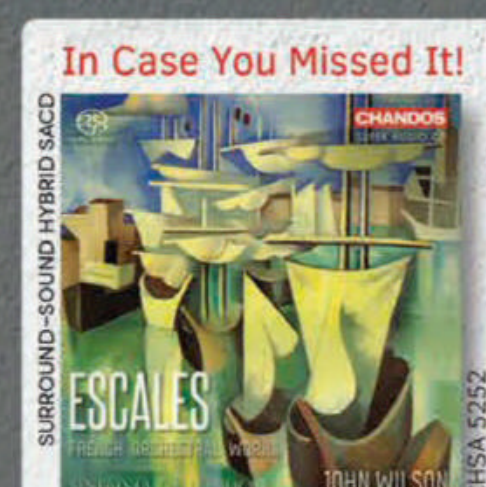
D. SCARLATTI

PIANO SONATAS, VOL. 2

Federico Colli

Following the sensational critical reception of his first volume, the Italian pianist Federico Colli continues his series of the sonatas of Domenico Scarlatti.

CHAN 20134



ESCALES

FRENCH ORCHESTRAL WORKS

Sinfonia of London
John Wilson

The performers capture the mood and spirit of these pieces with consummate skill and outstanding musicianship.

CHSA 5252

GRAMOPHONE GUIDE TO ... *Passacaglia*

Lindsay Kemp traces the development of the form from the Renaissance to modernity

Or chaconne. Or ground bass if you like. Theoretically these terms have different meanings, but it would be wasting space to attempt to outline them here, especially as they often fail to hold up against composers' actual usages. Essentially, they all denote the same thing: a set of free variations spun out over a short, repeating pattern in the bass line. Henry Purcell described 'Composing upon a Ground' as 'a very easie thing to do, and requires but little Judgment'. But then, he was one of the form's greatest masters, as jewels such as 'Dido's Lament', *An Evening Hymn* and *Music for a While* testify.

The form's origins in dance music (the chacona from Latin America, the passacalle from Spain) also mean that it is often in triple-time, which helps give it a lilting momentum over the course of what can sometimes be many repetitions. It's a form that can develop enormous cumulative weight over time, but length also seems to be part of the challenge in such ingenious compositions as Byrd's *The Bells* (eight minutes on a two-note ground!) or Bach's D minor Chaconne for solo violin (about 15 minutes). As extemporisers, keyboard players often loved the form: Frescobaldi wrote influential ciaccone and passachagli, and Buxtehude, too, liked a ciacconna, though the crowning example is Bach's *Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor*.

French harpsichordists were also masters of the chaconne – there are rich and noble ones by Louis and François Couperin – but equally prominent was the particular role given to it by Lully and Rameau in their operas and ballets, where it would



Dido in grief: Purcell's *Lament* is a perfect example of a repeating bass line

appear (danced on stage) at the end of the evening, after the plot has been sewn up and everyone can happily rejoice. As such, they were among the most substantial and colourful orchestral movements of the day; the most celebrated were Lully's chaconnes for *Armide* and *Phaëton*.

The Classical era, with its new structures centred around sonata form, did not have much time for the passacaglia. The famous fandangos by Soler and Boccherini could be described as 'sort-of' passacaglias, but it was not for another hundred years that another great chaconne appeared, when in 1884 Brahms had a eureka moment, tweaking the repeating bass line of a movement from a Bach cantata and building the superb finale of his Fourth Symphony on it. Inevitably, deployment of it since then has tended to be deliberately referential – Webern's *Passacaglia* of 1908 is a clear homage to the past, and the 'Chacony' of Britten's Second String Quartet self-announces its debt to Purcell – but no one could doubt the expressive or dramatic truth of the *Passacaglia* that implacably limns Peter Grimes's isolation in Britten's opera, or the weight of movements such as the finale of Shostakovich's Second Piano Trio or the fourth movement of his Eighth Symphony. The staying power of the passacaglia, it seems, is literally inevitable. **G**

IN THE STUDIO

● As we went to press, **Robin Ticciati** was about to take his Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin into the studio to record their sixth album for Linn, Rachmaninov's Second Symphony, a work they toured last autumn in Asia. Look out for a release later this year.

● **Robert Smith's** beautiful recording of Marais on Resonus was an Editor's Choice last autumn. He's now taken his viola da gamba back into the studio for the label, recording Bach sonatas with harpsichordist **Francesco Corti**. The release is set for September.

● One of today's most enterprising choirs, the **Choir of Trinity College, Cambridge**, last month laid down two albums for Hyperion. Finnish composer Jakko Mäntyjärvi will be unfamiliar to many, but advocacy from **Stephen Layton** is among the best a choral composer can get, so we look forward to the album next spring. Due a little later in 2021 is an album featuring the powerful choral music of Cecilia McDowall.

● **Christian Tetzlaff** and **Lars Vogt** have started a cycle of Beethoven's violin sonatas for Ondine. The first disc, scheduled for release in the autumn, contains the three sonatas Op 30.

● Just before Christmas, the cellist **Marc Coppey** joined the Polish National Radio Orchestra and conductor **Lawrence Foster** in Katowice in southern Poland to record the two Cello Concertos by Shostakovich. The results will be issued by Audite later this year.

● **Stephen Farr** was at St Giles' Cathedral in Edinburgh in mid-February to record the complete organ works of James MacMillan on the building's 1992 Rieger organ. Look out for this recording in August, on Resonus.

● **Harry Christophers** and **The Handel and Haydn Society** were back recording in Boston's Symphony Hall in January, for their next Haydn instalment – the *Nelson* Mass and Symphony No 100, the *Military*, one of his 12 London symphonies. Look out for a Coro release in November.

● Following a series of recordings with Decca as a fresh-faced rising star, and then a period largely out of the spotlight, the Swedish pianist **Peter Jablonski** has made his first recording for Ondine. The album of Scriabin's complete Mazurkas will be available in March: look out for a review in *Gramophone* soon.

ORCHESTRA *Insight ...*

Freiburg Baroque Orchestra

Our monthly series telling the story behind an orchestra

Founded 1987

Home Freiburg Ensemblehaus

Music Directors Gottfried von der Goltz & Kristian Bezuidenhout

It started at a party on New Year's Eve 1985, in an earnest town in Baden-Württemberg on the western edge of the Black Forest. High from the bubbles in fizzy wine, a group of students from the Freiburg College of Music made an unlikely New Year's Resolution: to form a musical ensemble in which they would play Baroque music on contemporaneous historic instruments or reconstructed models.

What sounded easy after a few glasses proved more arduous in the cold, sober light of day – fraught with ideology, congested by academic discussion and frustrated by practical obstacles. But on November 8, 1987, almost two years after that party, the ensemble made its debut. At the Burgheim Church in Lahr, the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra introduced itself to the world with music of that era from England, France, Italy and the Netherlands – the heartlands of the historically informed performance movement that was beginning to transform Europe's classical music scene.

As it settles into its fourth decade, the FBO can make a good claim to be the most distinguished ensemble of its kind, one associated with the sound of Baroque music delivered with balance, elegance, vitality and not inconsiderable expertise. It has won three *Gramophone* Awards and been described in these pages as 'the finest of the period instrument ensembles by a long way'. Its knowledge and appreciation of Baroque music is apparently constantly evolving, noticeably in its ability to creep idiomatically into the particular stylistic nuances of music from



France, Italy, Germany and elsewhere and to return to staples of the repertoire with a fresh accent.

Like so many groups of its kind, the FBO has broadened its horizons beyond the confines of the Baroque era. It has long been associated with the vocal and operatic works of Mozart and Haydn, due in part to a string of statement recordings made under the pencil-baton of René Jacobs (he has most recently extended his discography with the original, 1805 version of Beethoven's *Leonore* – reviewed last month). These days, the FBO is as likely to appear on record accompanying concertos by Bach or one of his sons as by Mendelssohn or Schumann.

The ensemble is discerning in its choice of conductors to the point of frequently not inviting one at all – playing instead under the watchful eye and lively bow of one of its concertmasters, Petra Müllejans and Gottfried von der Goltz. Both have been mainstays on record for this, the one Baroque ensemble for whom the recording boom apparently never ended.

Andrew Mellor

ARTISTS & *their* INSTRUMENTS

Ashley Solomon on the Spohr historical flute collection

“It was one of those chance encounters. I was doing a masterclass in Frankfurt and was introduced to Peter Spohr, an amateur flute player who has been collecting flutes for 45 years. I knew of his 600-strong historical collection and asked if I could come over and see it. When I entered the music room at his house, there were around 30 Baroque flutes laid out on top of the harpsichord. I was like a kid in a sweet shop!

They were all in fantastic condition, made of a variety of wood – ebony, boxwood, plumwood, ivory ... They were challenging to play – little idiosyncrasies like certain notes being out of tune, and I had to make adjustments to the air speed and the way I blew across the mouthpiece. But already I was learning so much about the different characteristics of German, Italian and French flutes, and why composers wrote the way they did. I've played regularly on copies of Baroque flutes for 30 years but, with no disrespect to the flute-makers of today, these don't allow you to get under the skin of an instrument in the same way. It was wonderful to have these original flutes in my hands!

When we came to record them, we settled on nine flutes, the earliest being the Chattillion from 1680 on which I recorded the duet with viola

da gamba by Morel (1700-47). When it came to recording the Telemann sonata on the Scherer flute from 1750, we had to be incredibly careful – it's made from ivory and Peter said, 'I guess we'll only know if you've played it for too long when it cracks'. I was terrified! But perhaps the most moving experience was recording the Bach Organ Trio Sonata BWV525 on the Denner flute from 1725. I had already recorded Bach sonatas on my Denner copy, made for me by Rod Cameron, but now I had the original! I had to change my approach this time around – the instrument's peculiarities with regard to intonation were magnified. But as a musician you're pushing boundaries all the time and a project like this gives you a new focus. It will inform how I approach this repertoire from now on, even on my modern Denner.”

Ashley Solomon's new album, *'The Spohr Collection'*, is released by Channel Classics on March 27



PHOTOGRAPHY: FOPPE SCHUT

FROM WHERE I SIT

Carlos Kleiber gave a never-to-be forgotten concert – and lesson in criticism, recalls Edward Seckerson



A great deal has already been written about Beethoven this year. Allow me to add to it. I have a vivid memory – a particular concert that took place on June 9, 1981 at London's Royal Festival Hall – and my experience of it, and the reaction to it, goes to the very heart of what being a critic is all about. The orchestra was the LSO and the conductor was the legendary Carlos Kleiber (in his first ever London concert) replacing the equally legendary but ailing Karl Böhm, the orchestra's President. Expectation was high. Controversy was the last thing on anyone's mind.


I was sitting in the choir stalls directly behind the orchestra and the programme is indelibly imprinted on my memory: Weber *Der Freischütz* Overture, Schubert Third, Beethoven Seventh. The Beethoven has always been my particular favourite of the canon, not least because for me it identifies the moment in music that rhythm – our most basic musical instinct – was catapulted into the cosmos there to set the universe vibrating. Forget 'the apotheosis of the dance' – this was rhythm as a *life* force.


Now remember that this Kleiber performance predated the 'period-performance' craze when the likes of Brüggner, Harnoncourt and Norrington stylistically reinitiated the shock of the new and had us listening to Beethoven with truly naked ears. Indeed this Kleiber reading fell more into the post-Klemperer than pre-Norrington period and was subsequently far more of a shock to the system. I remember the dotted rhythm of the first movement taking hold and growing, no exploding, with what can only be described as joy unrestrained and irrepressible. Never had I experienced the symphony sounding more completely and utterly *spontaneous*, like the notes were tumbling forth in the heat of inspiration, raw and unvarnished.

The LSO were on fire, not mindful of subtlety and nuance but rather of the energy that they and Kleiber were releasing from these well-worn notes. Come the finale – which is that rare instance of a string section assuming the role of generator or better yet national grid – the gloves were off and Bacchic fury pummelled us into willing submission. The whole performance was elemental, coarse, punchy, euphoric and utterly thrilling. The audience went berserk and I walked from it on shaky legs.

And then the broadsheet critics had their say (I was still a fledgling and not one of their number at the time) and apart from *The Observer's* Peter Heyworth, who echoed my every emotion, the reviews were savagely denigrating. One of their number even suggested that Kleiber's 'aggressive idiosyncracies' were merely a wilful attempt to 'do things differently' and draw attention to himself rather than the music. But the music – as our period practitioners came to realise – had become weighed down in decades of so-called 'tradition' and we needed somehow to rekindle, as Kleiber had done, the original spark of inspiration.

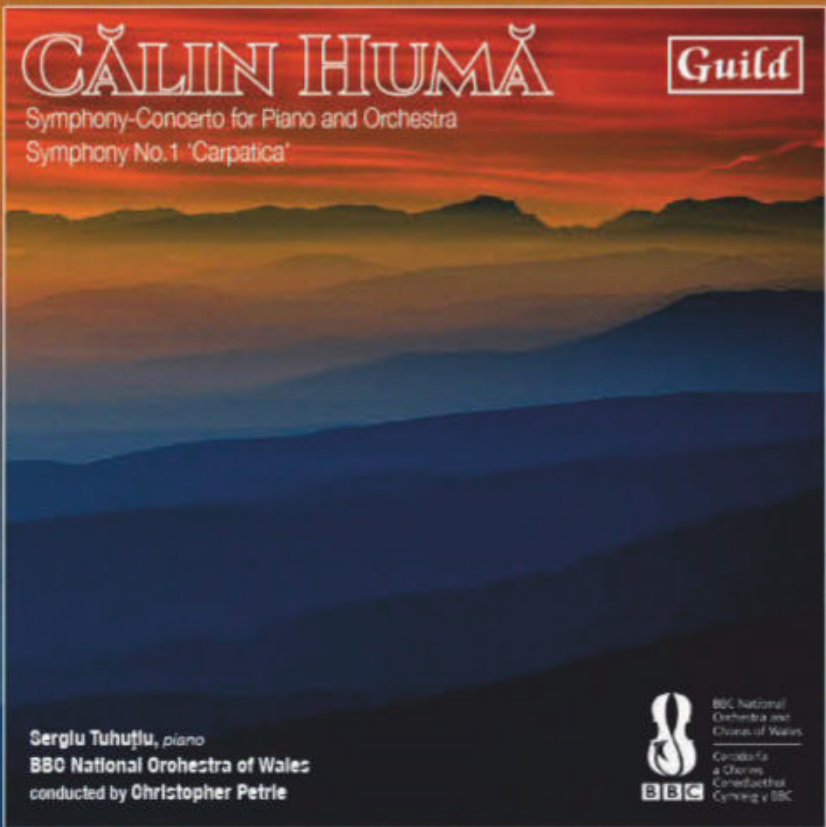
So that was the day I vowed to trust my own musicality (it's the most valuable gift a critic has), be true to my own instincts, and never to conform to received wisdom.


Carlos Kleiber never performed another concert in London. 



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Subversive DREAMER

Behind conductor Teodor Currentzis's radical performances lies a devotion to detail and a total fascination with recording. Peter Quantrill meets him

Vienna was a city under construction when I flew in last April. All around the Ring, cranes towered over familiar landmarks. Pockmarked by building sites and slathered in wet concrete, the Karlsplatz was having a facelift. But then Vienna has a history of radical makeovers as well as handsome facades. The city of Freud and Elfriede Jelinek no less than of Maria Theresa and the Prince-Archbishop Colloredo. The city of Mozart.

It's a setting as apt as any, then, for a meeting with Teodor Currentzis. The Greek-Russian conductor is in town to direct two performances of Verdi's Requiem, in the middle of a tour with his MusicAeterna choir and orchestra. It was back in 2004 that he formed the ensemble around him, a few months after François-Xavier Roth founded Les Siècles, and it's thanks to both groups that our understanding of what a 'period-instrument' orchestra does has experienced a sea change over the past decade. The MusicAeterna instruments change from project to project, but the personnel are largely fixed. Intensive rehearsal periods go hand in hand with flexibility and flair in applying historically informed ideas to repertoire from the Baroque to the present day. Since signing to Sony in 2012, their recordings have excited breathless panegyrics and withering censure. Currentzis gets people talking like few other classical musicians in the limelight.

The venue for Verdi is the Konzerthaus, sulking over the south-eastern edge of the Ring, bumptious younger brother to the Musikverein and one of several second homes for MusicAeterna. They camped here for a week in the summer of 2018 to record the Fifth and Seventh symphonies of Beethoven before taking Salzburg by storm with a complete cycle. A one-off London gig of the Second and Fifth rocked critics and Prommers alike back on their heels. Was it speed or volume, energy or detail that gave these masterpieces a facelift of their own?

Over tea at the Hotel Imperial, Currentzis demurs. 'Some performances are much quicker by the clock.

If you put my speeds against the metronome, you will find them quite normal, nothing special. It's the attitude that makes the difference.' By attitude in this case he means articulation, and for illustration he pulls out my score of the Fifth. 'It's the hemiolas in the trio, say, that make it feel faster. Here is an Irish dance.' I think of a tarantella rather than a jig, though, listening to the flying basses of MusicAeterna on the Sony recording. No less astonishing in their way are the phrasing across the pulse, and the conversational play with dynamics. 'That's our game!' replies Currentzis. 'You can count two bars in three – that's the game of the music. And here' – he points to bars 185 to 186, singing them in three while clicking his fingers against the beat in two like a contredanse.

Rhythmic articulation – and its often phenomenal execution by his players – is a Currentzis obsession. He remarks on the difference between an *alla breve* 2/2 and a 4/4 time signature, and cites the overture to *Le nozze di Figaro*. 'We know that Wagner conducted it like Harnoncourt did – very fast, but in four, not *alla breve*. But when Wagner was rehearsing it, there was one old man there in the rehearsal who said, "No, I was there when Mozart did it, and he did it very fast in two." Dotted notes are more *inégaies* in *alla breve*, 4/4 is more *misurato*. *Alla breve* is more dancelike and has more gesture. And when there is a *misurato* 4/4 passage, I try to make it so that there is a lot of inner energy to the articulation. When we have the genetic memory of a hundred years of recordings, we use it and remember the melody line and the bass, but much of the inner detail can't be retained. If suddenly you hear the inner voices giving off a lot of energy, you feel that the music is faster.'

RECORDS AND RECORDINGS

As the first volume of a planned cycle, Beethoven's Fifth has been released on its own, old-school, like an LP. Indulgence? Currentzis may style himself many ways – film star, poet, perfumier, take your pick – but he is a records man through and through. We go back to his teenage years, growing up in Athens. 'In the mid-1980s my father and mother were divorced,



and I would go over to my father's to listen – he was a music enthusiast with a good hi-fi, and I had my own library of discs there. Then in '89 my mother bought equipment so I could listen at home. That was a beautiful time. I had friends working in LP shops and we would order all sorts of underground releases – experimental, industrial as well as classical music.

We would take our own discs into the shop so that we could listen to them together, like a symposium. We were discovering things that were hard to find in the days before the internet. You will remember those times of friends and music.' Loitering around London's second-hand LP shops at much the same time, I do.

'*The Rite of Spring* came on an LP by itself,' he continues. 'Ansermet with the Suisse Romande, Boulez with the Cleveland on CBS Masterworks. And afterwards the record labels made budget editions. You had *Rite*, *Firebird* and *Petrushka* all together on an ugly CD edition. You had all three together, but for me it wasn't the same. I wanted a *piatto unico*. Every recording should be a unique item.' That's what Currentzis wants to do with Beethoven. 'We have a logistical problem with recording all the symphonies in the right way and in the right place. I want first of all to record Nos 5, 7, 9 and 3. But if you do them all in a row it's very difficult to isolate each symphony in a way that doesn't make them sound a bit like the others.'

Having learnt the violin in childhood, Currentzis trained to be a singer at the Athens Conservatoire. 'I had a very good voice, and I did a lot of opera and Lieder. But I found that I was



Currentzis palpably inspires commitment in his MusicAeterna players and singers

a little bit too good for being a singer.' He sees my raised eyebrow and continues: 'To spend all my life doing Italian opera wasn't what I wanted to do. My real talent was composing, and I did a lot of that, I'm doing it now, and I will do more in the future.'

Conducting came later. 'I thought that people were deciding to give

very moderate, boring performances of music like Mahler, that it was a conscious decision on their part. Then when I went to rehearsals I found that they couldn't do anything else, they weren't seeing more within the score. And I said, "This cannot be." I decided to take some lessons in conducting, so that if I was coaching a chamber group, for example, I wouldn't look ridiculous. I would have a few basic skills. And then, after a few lessons, I was told, "Oh, you are a conductor." And I laughed, because it hadn't been what I wanted to do at all. But I took it more seriously, and I found that it worked. This was the early '90s, and we lost a kind of inspiration in music-making around then. I asked myself, "Where does this romantic spirit survive?" In Russia. So I said to my parents that I must go to St Petersburg. And it started from there.'

THE HERITAGE OF HOMER

At the level of physical grammar, the Currentzis technique – batonless, fluid and febrile – has its grounding in the classes of Ilya Musin. This pre-eminent Russian conducting school traces its roots back to Fritz Stiedry, a Mahler disciple who settled in St Petersburg and handed down the formulas of Mahler's conducting genius to Musin, his assistant.

Currentzis then did the hard yards in Siberia, taking charge of the Novosibirsk Opera in 2004 and forming MusicAeterna. In 2014 he was granted Russian citizenship by presidential decree. Like Dimitri Mitropoulos before him, he is fêted whenever he returns to Athens: but is he in any meaningful sense a Greek conductor?

Currentzis laughs. 'I am very Greek, the Greekest Greek! From the Crisis Generation' – the ever-turbulent years of the country's fragile modern democracy – 'and anarchist, and against any Greek government. But I will say one thing – for me the most important thing is the language. To be Greek is not to be born there. It is to know Sophocles and Homer, and the closest dimension to music is poetry.' He opens my score of Beethoven's Seventh, most classically formed of the nine symphonies in its metrical structures. 'These are all syllables. This is why the European training in music has less meaning than the Indian, where they phrase everything in syllables. A European education makes you believe that you say the truth, and then you have to reproduce the music that way. I believe more in the Eastern appreciation of music as an extension of the imagination in other spheres.'

'I didn't want "beautiful" – those things you criticise were exactly what I wanted to achieve, but with another morality'

Two and a half hours into our chat, the teapot has long lain cold and empty. We move on to the wine. 'Music is a language, and like a verbal language it compresses an idea into a signal that allows us to communicate. You might listen to me conducting the Beethoven symphonies and say, "This passage is not nice, this is too fast, that is too rough, but the second movement is beautiful and beautiful and beautiful". But maybe "beautiful" wasn't what I wanted. And those things you criticise were exactly what I wanted to achieve, but with another morality.'

SOLITARY PURSUITS

Moralities and games and dreams encircle our conversation, while rationalist Anglo-Saxon creaks under the pressure of ideas more elegantly expressed in Russian or Greek, French or German. Currentzis has assembled six different hi-fi set-ups, and he reels off a list of high-end speakers at his disposal: Tannoy Westminster, Wilson Audio, Bowers & Wilkins, Focal. He swears by the valve amplifiers and cabling made to order by the English company Audio Note (prices on application). 'I would love to test the Western Electric amplifiers. When you used to go to the cinema, and the door would open, and the sound would embrace you – that's the sound of Western Electric.' He compares a good hi-fi to a bed. 'Of course, it's great to sleep in a Savoir bed that costs thousands of pounds, but that won't guarantee you the best night's sleep. You can dream a bit with equipment that has been matched with love, it can be more beautiful than a system bought with lots of money.'

Classical is a poor cousin to rock for post-production standards, according to Currentzis: he points out that Pink Floyd spent the best part of a year recording and editing *Dark Side of the Moon*. 'Yet in the classical world, over something as complex as Britten's *War Requiem*, people take a week. It can't really give you more than a memory of the real piece. But in rock, because the piece isn't there in the first place, it isn't written down, they are producing a level of quality that is necessary for the final product. Engineering in the rock world is much more sophisticated.'

PHOTOGRAPHY: ALEXANDRA MURAVEVA

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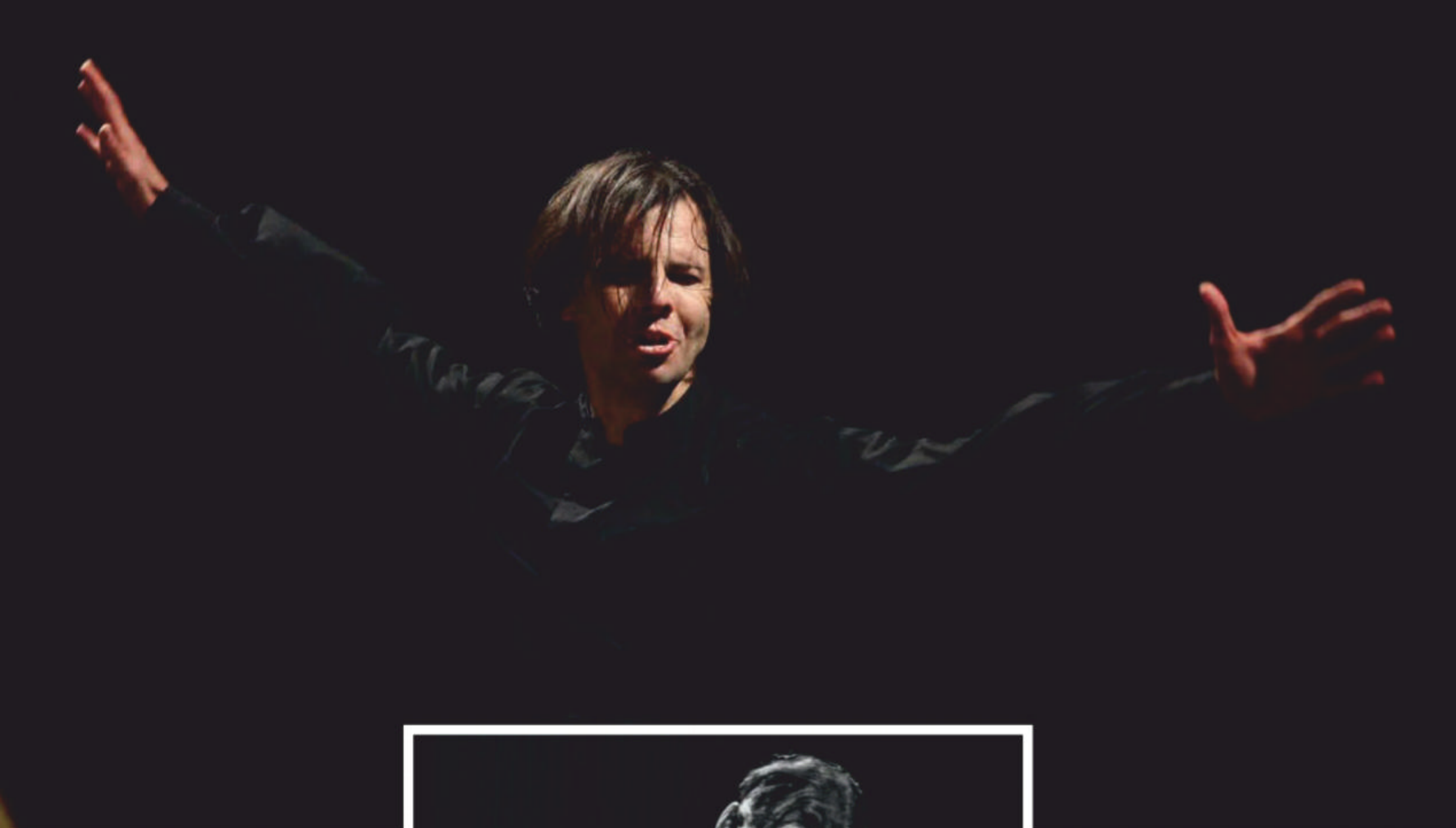
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So is he aiming to produce a performance you couldn't hear live? 'Yes, exactly. In the concert hall, you can't be isolated from other people with their programmes and their coughing. I get frustrated because I can't dream in the concert hall as a listener, I don't have the intimacy I need and I get a bit claustrophobic. The consolation that you get from music when you're by yourself is special. Then there's the feeling you get when you share music with someone you love: just the two of you, isolated, as if the music is playing only for you. That's a great privilege, and I work really hard to bring that privilege to people.'

This frame of mind accounts for the all-enveloping, 360-degree sound world of the *Pathétique* Symphony on Sony. Typically for Currentzis, the record divided opinion (voting on the shortlist of the *Gramophone* Awards, critics placed it either top or bottom of the category), and it turns out that he mixed the original CD mastering specifically for listening on headphones. The vinyl cut of the *Pathétique* was rebalanced for the medium, but he isn't quite happy with it, and intends to make adjustments for a second pressing. 'The problem there is the lower frequencies in the Funkhaus Berlin, where we recorded it. The compressor is the cruellest thing in recording reality. But we have to deal with it in a smart way, and I think we can do it better in terms of remastering digital recordings



Currentzis wants listeners to his records to feel the emotion he feels on the podium

for analogue.' That he can even entertain the possibility of such refinements speaks not only for a perfectionist temperament but also for its popular and commercial reward in a volatile market.

At the Konzerthaus sessions in the summer of 2018, the *Seventh* was recorded twice, using AAA and DDD technology. 'Of course, there are things common to each interpretation,' says Currentzis, 'but the digital version had a more analytical approach to the sound of the piece. For a start, there are more possibilities to do post-production. But in the analogue version we could capture a little more of the liveness of a concert

performance. We did a blind test on people coming to the sessions. We gave them two sets of headphones: same piece, same orchestra, same conductor, same take. Nine times out of ten they preferred the analogue. All the defects of the analogue recordings – the warmth, we call it – are natural. This is the difference between a woman and a mannequin!'

It's hard to get past that word warmth when accounting for the unique qualities of analogue recording, but we try. The difference is as much unconscious and psychologically driven as technological. 'Every time you play the LP it's slightly different because it degrades. We're not fetishistic about recreating a certain analogue ideal, like that of Decca. This is past.

They made superb recordings. But what I'm looking for – and this sounds egoistic – is the sound I hear when I'm on the podium. A warmth, but not warmth we describe coming from a high-end hi-fi, the kind of warmth you get from really good mono recordings. You remember the HMV recordings of Edwin Fischer and Giesecking? I find that these touch me more than most stereo recordings, certainly of a piano. I don't mean that the listener should hear the exact balance that I hear on the podium, but they should feel the emotion and the idea of the sound.'

What he really wants is something many *Gramophone* readers will recognise, an experience that removes him from a simulacrum of sitting in the seventh row of a concert hall, programme in hand. He's looking for an orchestral microclimate with its own air and sense of gravity. 'A world like this takes a little time for the ear to adjust to. And once you have adjusted to it, you want something else. That's why high-end hi-fi maniacs are changing cables and hardware all the time – there's no end to it. But I sit at home at night and play 78s – say the Schubert B flat Trio with Cortot, Thibaud and Casals – and I find they give the most emotional experience of all. Sitting in front of the horn and really listening, it's like the spirit of the musicians is actually inside the horn, whispering to you something about yourself. You don't care about the quality in itself, you care about the emotion. And that's what I want to do – to create not only a good sound but a transport for discovering unique and magic worlds in music.'

BAD BOY OR CLASS SWOT?

Scepticism and suspicion of such ambitions probably reached fever pitch in September last year when the MusicAeterna circus rolled into Vienna once more, trailing their well-grooved but wayward trilogy of the Mozart/da Ponte operas. According to the critic of one of Vienna's more reputable dailies, their *Figaro* was 'one of the worst that I can remember: a third-class orchestra with third-class soloists, whipped through the score by a conductor hyped as the messiah of the classical world who was unable to keep any of the media's promises.'

Claims that Currentzis would 'change the face of classical music' have not helped to dispel the image of a maestro assiduous in courting publicity and indecently convinced of his own genius, but the lingering charge of charlatanism folds in the face of the commitment Currentzis invests in rehearsal and so palpably inspires in his players and singers. He explains that of all the nine Beethoven symphonies, he found the Ninth hardest to prepare, taxed most of all by the cello recitative in the finale where countless performances come to grief over the rocks of Beethoven's marking: 'In the character of a recitative, but strictly in tempo'. 'It's super-difficult to get the cellos and basses to move like they are declaiming a text,' says Currentzis, 'so I wrote one for them,' and he sings it in an inky *basso profondo*. 'I did sectional rehearsals for a week with pairs of cellists and bassists and then three rehearsals with the whole section.'

The following morning I see Currentzis at work for myself, topping and tailing movements from the Verdi. Excepting Christoph von Dohnányi, I have not encountered a conductor quite so consumed by minute calculations of intonation, but he keeps his cool even after the 20th repetition of the brass fanfares announcing the 'Tuba mirum'. Microphone in hand, he directs proceedings from the centre of the stalls in a melange of Russian and English. He moves the offstage

trumpeters from their stations by the side doors of the orchestra, back and forth along the upper flanks of the Konzerthaus, patiently eliminating problems of visibility and acoustic anomalies. Finally he gives a thumbs-up to the trumpets, and from nowhere the uniquely resinous MusicAeterna string sound surges into the empty hall, tearing away at string scales that are usually lost amid the tumult of damnation. This passage, too, is finessed nine or ten times – it's worth bearing in mind that the reading has already been put together at home in Perm over the course of a fortnight and more, and then toured for a week, with another week of performances still to come. Everyone turns back to the score's opening page, and he builds up the first string chord note by note until it is pitched somewhere between Palestrina and Arvo Pärt, warmed by the merest breath of vibrato.

DREAMS AND DIVINATIONS


Until last summer, MusicAeterna was based in Perm, a thousand miles east of Moscow, where Currentzis had taken up the directorship of the opera house in 2011. He conducted the house orchestra when he wished and then kept them cooling their heels when he brought MusicAeterna into the pit for projects such as the Mozart/da Ponte operas. The band is now based in St Petersburg, and the conductor divides most of his time between it and the SWR Symphony Orchestra in Stuttgart. With both ensembles he runs what he calls 'laboratories': open rehearsals, especially of new music, which prepare both audiences and musicians for bold juxtapositions of repertoire such as Feldman and Brahms.

A production of Helmut Lachenmann's *Little Match Girl* opera is a dream yet to be realised. So is a collaboration with Peter Sellars on Bach's B minor Mass, after their entrancing two-hander of Tchaikovsky's *Iolanta* with Stravinsky's *Perséphone* in Madrid (1/13). In fact, Currentzis surely boasts a run-in operatic repertoire more various than that of any living conductor, from Purcell's *Indian Queen* to Wolfgang Rihm's *Die Eroberung von Mexico*, not excluding *Carmen*, *Don Carlos* and

Das Rheingold along the way – this last with MusicAeterna for the 2015 Ruhrtriennale. If anyone has what the Greeks call *thrasos* – boldness, you might say – to mount a long-overdue

'That moment in the Act 3 Prelude of Tristan und Isolde is the craziest moment in music since the St John Passion of Bach'

period-instrument *Ring*, it's Currentzis. 'I think Wagner needs period sonorities much more than Verdi,' he reflects. 'Look at the third-act Prelude of *Tristan*. You have in that moment a feeling of pregnancy – the wounded Tristan is like an embryo. And then this long cor anglais solo, after two hours of music, with two thousand people listening to a single instrument. It is the craziest moment in music since the *St John Passion* of Bach.'

Such music, says Currentzis, has a 'spiritual amorality', and he loses me. 'You go to an Orthodox chapel,' he explains, 'and you see a corpse hanging on the cross: "This is the King of Glory." It is an amoral, illogical thing for Christ to be a lamb in the teeth of the wolf. When you sing, "Herr, herr, herr", you can sing it with force and nice consonants, but if it doesn't come from the middle of your existence, if you can't make it incarnate like Leonardo's Vitruvian man, the body exposed (because the body is just furniture without spirit), if you don't feel a universe of emptiness and a river of blood in this chorus, then why bother?' There's no arguing with that. 

Currentzis's Sony Classical recording of Beethoven's *Fifth* is released this month; the *Seventh* is released in the autumn, along with an LP



Maverick MAESTRO

As Michael Tilson Thomas steps down as Music Director of the San Francisco Symphony, orchestral musicians and the conductor himself talk to **Steven Winn** about a musical golden era

Shortly after he was appointed Music Director of the San Francisco Symphony in 1995, Michael Tilson Thomas led a performance of *The Rite of Spring*. Horn principal Robert Ward, who has been a member of the orchestra since 1980, has never forgotten it: 'I don't think I'd ever heard an audience roar in quite that way before.'

Now, 25 years later, as Tilson Thomas's tenure on the Davies Symphony Hall podium nears its end in June 2020, that early fervent response has grown into a multi-voiced chorus of respect, gratitude, sustained enthusiasm and mutual devotion. MTT, as he is affectionately and universally known, feels as deeply connected to the audience and his ensemble as they do to him.

In the course of a wide-ranging conversation at the home in San Francisco's Pacific Heights neighbourhood which the conductor shares with his husband, Joshua Robison, Tilson Thomas has warm words for everyone, from listeners who have 'openly and generously followed the various paths we've explored' and his 'phenomenal and fully committed' musicians to the orchestra's librarians and his longtime recording producer Jack Vad.

'My relationship with the orchestra is on the best terms it's ever been,' the 75-year-old Tilson Thomas says, settling into a chair in his living room with a loose-limbed, youthful ease that belies his age. 'That's unusual after such a long period. We have a very cordial, concerned and caring relationship with one another. We know what we have to do and do it with a great deal of humour as well as focus.'

Tilson Thomas, whose show-business roots stretch back to his paternal grandparents' careers in the Yiddish theatre (a legacy he documented in his winning and widely seen stage tribute *The Thomashefskys*), likens his role as Music Director to that of the leader of a repertory theatre company. 'No really good director would ever tell an actor to say the first three words of a line loudly, then pause and say the next three haltingly. It's the same thing with the orchestra, where I'm not so much telling them to do something as I am pointing out an opportunity. What they're thinking might be different from what I imagined or have ever imagined. I believe that's the most creative and rewarding way to go. Together we've evolved a certain idea of music-making – personal, gestural, a colouring-outside-the-lines approach.'

The evidence is there for all to witness, both in the concert hall and on the recordings that document Tilson Thomas and his ensemble's collaborative immersion in Beethoven, Berlioz, Bernstein, Copland, Ives, Mahler and many others. Routinely recorded live on the orchestra's own label, SFS Media, the discs have earned 11 Grammys.

The route to a vital and felicitous final year has been an eventful, consistently engaging and sometimes unpredictable one. It has taken the San Francisco Symphony around the world, on regular tours to Europe, Asia and cities large (New York)

and not so large (Ames, Iowa) across the US. The musical terrain expanded on many other fronts as well – with concerts in new forms and settings, forays into video and digital media, and singular programming initiatives. Perhaps nothing has marked the MTT years in San Francisco more strongly than his commitment to the pioneering music of his own country.

That was apparent right away, when the Los Angeles-born Tilson Thomas placed at least one American composer on every programme of his initial season. His 25th season, 2019-20, reaffirms that unwavering conviction with the New American Sound programme of premieres and commissions, featuring works by Julia Wolfe, Adam Schoenberg, Aaron Zigman and Tilson Thomas himself (*Meditations on Rilke* and *Lope*).

In 2000, MTT launched an enthusiastically received American Mavericks festival, showcasing works by such composers as Ives, Cage, Cowell and the West Coast visionary Lou Harrison. A 2012 American Mavericks reprise featured Ruggles, Feldman, Ruth Crawford Seeger and John Adams, among others. An 'American Mavericks' disc includes exciting, raw-boned accounts of Cowell's *Synchrony* and his combustive Piano Concerto, Harrison's *Concerto for Organ with Percussion Orchestra* and Varèse's *Amérique*.

'In the studio you can find yourself in pursuit of what might turn out to be a rather sterile concept of perfection' – MTT

Commissions and collaborations with American and especially San Francisco Bay Area composers have flourished over the years, fruitful enterprises preserved in such stellar recordings as Adams's jubilant and witty *Absolute Jest* (released 2015) and the 2016 album 'Mason Bates: Works for Orchestra', with its driving, DJ-inspired electronica. Adams, whose relationship with the orchestra dates back to the late 1970s, praised the recording of his piece, calling it 'full of energy and virtuoso playing'. An earlier recording of the composer's *Harmonielehre* is 'brilliantly and confidently played', in the composer's words, 'as if the orchestra felt they own the piece, which they pretty much do'. Both pieces, he added, 'fit Michael's personality and special talents to a T'.

For Tilson Thomas, recording live is essential. 'I feel the result is better', he says, 'when it comes from a performance where you are trying to communicate with an audience. It has a certain sweep to it.' In a studio setting, according to the conductor, 'You can get preoccupied with whether the music is "correct" – whatever that means. You find yourself doing shorter and shorter takes in pursuit of what might turn out to be a rather sterile concept of perfection.'

A night when a performance is being recorded at Davies Symphony Hall brings an air of heightened drama and anticipation for listeners and performers alike, with the microphones suspended on slender wires above the stage. Musical posterity, to one degree or another, is at stake. The players are all in.

'I definitely prefer recording live,' says principal oboist Eugene Izotov. 'We need an audience for the very palpable, visual chemistry that happens.' Izotov cites a recording-night performance of Ives's Symphonies No 3 (*The Camp Meeting*) and No 4. Both orchestral works were preceded, as they are on the disc, by the San Francisco Symphony Chorus singing some of the American hymns the composer taps as musical source material. 'It was during "Nearer, my God, to thee",' Izotov

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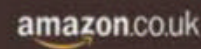
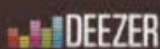
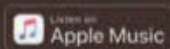
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remembers. 'Our role as the orchestra was to remain absolutely quiet as the chorus sang. That gave me the rare opportunity to scan the faces of the audience and see the light in Michael's eyes on the podium. Then when we played the symphony, I could sense how much that moment had contributed to my own understanding of and feeling for the music. And to the feeling of playing for a community of people.'

For horn principal Ward, the opening bars of Mahler's Symphony No 3, a clarion call from the horn section, stand out. 'I walked off the stage that night and went directly to the recording people. "You *have* to use that one!" I told them.'

More likely than not they did. Ninety per cent of what ends up on a live recording, Tilson Thomas says, will come from a single one of the three or four performances captured by the sound team. Gratifying as the process may be, the music itself is always a work in progress. 'When you make a recording and finish it,' he muses, 'you know tomorrow would be the perfect day to go back and start from the beginning.' Referring to the orchestra's recording of the complete Mahler cycle, a singular and shining achievement, he observes: 'There are some amazing performances that we love – the Ninth Symphony, the Sixth, some astonishing good things in the Seventh. But I also know the orchestra feels that some of the performances of those pieces have evolved considerably further since we recorded them.'

With *Keeping Score*, an innovative video series launched in 2004, Tilson Thomas found the ideal form for his gifts as a communicator.

Combining orchestral performance with musical explication, historical background, and visits to important locations in a composer's life, each episode focuses on a single work – Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, Shostakovich's Symphony No 5, Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony, among others – to deepen viewers' understanding and absorption in the music. First aired on America's Public Broadcasting Service and preserved on DVD, the shows have been seen by uncountable millions, young and old alike.

As the series' peerless host, Tilson Thomas proved once again that he is 'one of the best convincers in classical music', as *New York Times* critic Anthony Tommasini wrote in



MTT in 1995, when he joined the SFS

2014. He accomplished it in *Keeping Score* with a blend of deep knowledge lightly worn, clarity, ebullient enthusiasm and good humour.

The idea for the shows came, Tilson Thomas reflects, 'from imagining that I was sitting on a piano bench next to someone while playing over some things from a score. Or that I was standing next to him or her in a rehearsal and I would say, "OK, catch this next bit coming up."' Then, as he explains, the exploration would lead naturally and inevitably, 'through the magic of television', to visiting, for example, the Bohemian village that informs Mahler's Symphony No 1. 'You just see how immediate the inspiration was and appreciate how the ideas

were developed.'

That instinct for plain-spoken intimacy, for the one-to-one address, distinguishes almost everything MTT has to say about music. It's as true in conversation as it is in *Keeping Score* or when he's speaking from the podium about a new piece the orchestra is about to perform. His aversion to anything pompous or dogmatic is apparent in his own well-chosen words and in his raffish take on a certain kind of woolly writing about music.

'When I read a programme note, very often I don't get what it means,' he says. 'And I'm a fairly educated and aware guy. If I'm not understanding phrases like "the tonatisation of the submediant does something or other", there's a problem, a barrier. If I have a choice between getting through to the professors and getting through to the guys at the gym, for sure

I'm going to choose the guys at the gym.'

In 2009, after a torrent of online auditions, Tilson Thomas inaugurated the globe-spanning YouTube Symphony Orchestra with a performance at Carnegie Hall, New York. Another followed at the Sydney Opera House in 2011. Tens of millions tuned in.

Back home, MTT has been getting through to a different, younger audience with SoundBox, an alternative performance space and series he started in 2014. Mounted in a cavernous rehearsal hall made acoustically viable and flexible by the Bay Area firm Meyer Sound, SoundBox concerts feature short pieces, dreamy projections, Tilson Thomas's deft



Top: MTT's first SFS opening night gala, 1995; bottom: with Meredith Monk and Lou Harrison in 2000



Keeping Score: on-set, including shots from the Copland edition and the Ives edition (at the composer's grave)

commentary and a busy bar. Other concerts in the main hall, like those programmed around the lunar new year and Día de los Muertos, have attracted a wider swath of the region's ethnically diverse population.

'MTT re-energised the orchestra and made it cool,' says Kary Schulman, who spent 38 years as director of Grants for the Arts, the entity responsible for San Francisco's non-profit funding. 'He not only reached new audiences but created opportunities to collaborate with a spectrum of Bay Area artists beyond Davies Symphony Hall – he almost literally tore down the walls.'

Inside, Tilson Thomas has continued to innovate and explore, with semi-staged productions of Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*, Britten's *Peter Grimes*, Debussy's *Le martyre de Saint Sébastien*, Bernstein's *West Side Story* and *On the Town*, and Beethoven's *Missa solemnis*, among others. A vivid project based on Ibsen's

Peer Gynt (also semi-staged, in 2013) fused excerpts from Grieg and Schnittke with new music by Robin Holloway.

Visually and dramatically exciting as many of them were, the semi-staged evenings were built around the ensemble. 'I always chose pieces where the main players would be the orchestra,' said Tilson Thomas, 'things like *On the Town* that don't really need the book to succeed.'

As MTT nears the end point of his music directorship, with a flurry of concerts fittingly capped by Mahler's Symphony No 8 (*Symphony of a Thousand*), he finds himself looking back at where it all began. When MTT took over the San Francisco Symphony from Herbert Blomstedt in 1995, the orchestra was a solid, first-rate, somewhat under-recognised ensemble that was 'committed to fulfilling the composer's goals', as horn player Ward puts it.

'I wanted to free up the orchestra,' says Tilson Thomas. He did it, in part, by focusing on certain members who played

with 'a wonderful panache and style'. Then trumpet principal Glenn Fischthal was one; current bassoon principal Stephen Paulson was another. 'I wanted to encourage those people who were playing in that way,' says MTT, 'and encourage everyone else in the orchestra to say, "This is OK, this is what we should be trying to do."'

The players, unmistakably, responded. 'Michael just has this wonderful curiosity about making music,' says oboist Izotov. 'It's contagious. Whether we're playing something very well known or not known at all, Michael has this ability to make it seem as if the ink is still wet on the pages.'

Tilson Thomas's programming has gone hand in hand with his emotional immediacy. Along with his advocacy of those American mavericks, he has looked for the unexpected throughout the repertoire. Instead of marching through the Brahms symphonies, he has chosen things like the composer's



Recent SFS performances: left: mezzo Isabel Leonard in MTT's *From the Diary of Anne Frank*; bass-baritone Ryan McKinny and mezzo Sasha Cooke in MTT's *Rilke songs*



In 1993, on announcement of the SFS job

two early and lesser-known Serenades. 'I wanted to get my fingers into the music,' he said, sitting up and wriggling them to illustrate, 'feel its tensile strength, its tension and release, its expressive world, without worrying about how some maestro or orchestra performed these two very familiar bars.'

That same spirit of innovation percolates through the recent recordings, whether in the spatial dimensions of Henry Brant's *Ice Field*, achieved for digital download with Dolby Atmos technology, or in the lean, propulsive accounts of the four Schumann symphonies.

Of the latter, Tilson Thomas remarks: 'Those

symphonies are kind of overwritten, with so many contradictory instructions that have been followed dutifully by so many conductors. We wanted to try to get back the spontaneity.'

MTT relishes his collaborations with recording producer Vad. 'We are a very clever team. Jack is the more conservative member, with a clear sense of the balance of sound, its representation and what kind of equipment people will be listening on. I'm the one who's always asking these crazy things, like, "Oh, why don't you turn off everything but the ambient microphones and see what happens?" Then he'll say he sees what I mean and try to find a way towards that.'

'He has a wonderful curiosity about music-making – an ability to make it seem as if the ink is still wet on the page' – Eugene Izotov, SFS oboist

The back and forth will continue with upcoming, still unscheduled releases of an all-Berg album (with violinist Gil Shaham) and a Brahms Requiem. A CD of Tilson Thomas's Rilke songs and *From the Diary of Anne Frank* comes out in June.

While the awards and accolades continue to pile up – a prestigious Kennedy Center Honor came in December – Tilson Thomas continues to look ahead. He plans to compose more, in part by returning to works he first sketched out in his teens and twenties. He will continue to lead the New World Symphony, the training ensemble he co-founded in Miami in 1987; and he'll be back on the Davies Symphony Hall podium as Music Director Laureate in tandem with Esa-Pekka Salonen, his successor as San Francisco Symphony Music Director.

'And there's another thing,' says Tilson Thomas, hopping up to bid me farewell. 'I'm going on vacation in September. It's the first time I've been able to do that in decades.'

A digital release of music by Copland will be available on March 13 ahead of an 11-city European tour



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HOMELAND & HISTORY

When Neil Fisher travels to Bavaria to explore what gives the Bamberg Symphony its soul, he finds rich pickings

Can a potato tell you anything about an orchestra? It can if you come to Bamberg in Bavaria. Stick with me here: this is a story about roots.

Bamberg, acclaimed for its picturesque architecture, is a Unesco World Heritage site, a designation that, unusually, covers all three parts of the old city. The least visited part and the most humble district is on the east bank of the right arm of the Regnitz river – the Gärtnerstadt ('Gardener's town'), where the city's urban farmers have been around for as long as the city itself. Hence the district's cultural importance, even if it is lower than the other parts on Gothic or Baroque splendours.

Urban farming in Bamberg is a business that has shrunk in the past century. The big fields have been filled in by extra housing, and globalised economics means it's harder to make money out of growing and selling onions or kohlrabi. It is quite literally a cottage industry. Yet there are still Bamberg gardeners today, many specialising in rare and old breeds. One is the city's own kind of potato: the Bamberger Hörnla. Local restaurants take pride in serving it, just as the taverns dish up litres of the city's home-grown smoked beer.

'Our players live in the thousand-year history of Bamberg – they play differently because of that' – Marcus Axt, orchestra intendant

On the other side of town, in the Konzerthalle where the orchestra is based, the Bamberg Symphony tends its own crop: Mozart, Bruckner, Dvořák, Mahler. When the orchestra is rehearsing or performing, you'll know because of all the bicycles lined up outside the stage door. I am told by the orchestra's veteran head of operations, Christian Schmölder, that last summer, when the orchestral parts had been doubled for a unique recording of Smetana's *Má vlast* (of which much more later), 85 of them were stacked up against the wall. If you don't have to cycle to work at the Bamberg Symphony, then you are near enough to walk. 'And when you walk here,' says the orchestra's intendant, Marcus Axt, 'you walk through a thousand years of history. I think our players live in this history, and play differently because of that.'

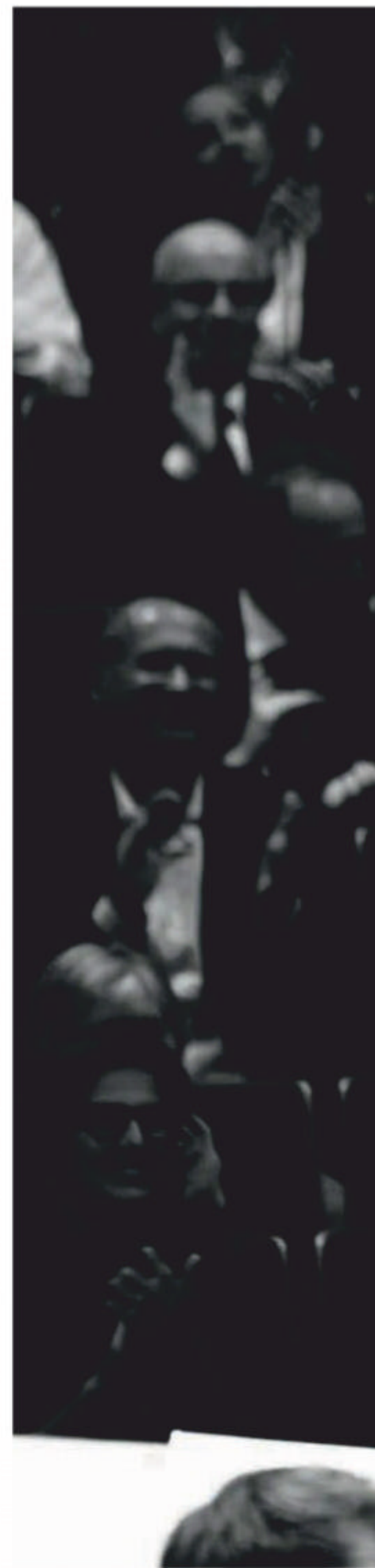
If it sometimes feels as if the orchestra business in the 21st century is about flashy chefs serving up novelty courses,

the Bamberg SO bucks the trend. It is classical music's answer to the slow-food movement, with Chief Conductor Jakub Hrůša already embedded until 2026 (he started in 2016 and his contract was extended in 2018). He is a man who prizes the gentle calm of his Bavarian digs. 'It does inspire me,' he says, when we meet shortly before a wholesome concert of Beethoven, Bruch and Dvořák. 'In our job, you can't just catch things from the air – you have to have focus. It doesn't work without study.'

Hrůša has divided his personal and professional life: although his wife and two young children will sometimes join him in Bamberg for weekends, the family home for Hrůša is in London (he is also Principal Guest Conductor of the Philharmonia Orchestra). 'But I've moved all my things here to Bamberg: scores, recordings. When I'm here alone with the orchestra, it's just a great learning process.'

He's as happy as a pig in mud, or perhaps a spud in Bamberg soil. 'There's no laziness in the orchestra, and the schedule is intense. The proximity of the players' homes, the comfort of the working environment ... we have a beautiful hall to work in and great management. Basically, I don't need to worry about anything else other than the art.' Perhaps Hrůša himself has been thinking about Bamberg's gardeners too. 'We prepare, we cook – and we present to a fantastic public.'

Bamberg has around 77,000 inhabitants, about 6000 of them subscribers to the orchestra's concerts, and I'm told that home fixtures are 97.5 per cent sold, even if programmes are repeated during the year. 'If we're going to record a piece, for example,' says Hrůša, 'then we place it more times in the season. But there's no need to worry about selling tickets, to think, "Oh, we did it in October, so we can't do it in May because people won't come." It's rather miraculous, but they simply do. Because they trust that what we're doing is always interesting. Basically, they follow our sense of direction.'





'People squeeze out such unnatural ways of promoting stuff. But we have something genuinely natural': says the Bamberg Symphony's first Czech Chief Conductor, Jakub Hrůša

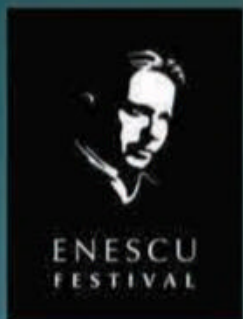
The deep dive at the moment is Hrůša and the Bambergers' ongoing series pairing Brahms and Dvořák symphonies, a project recorded on Tudor that is going backwards chronologically with the works selected. It began with Dvořák's Ninth and Brahms's Fourth, continuing last year with the Eighth and Third, an album praised in *Gramophone* (10/19) by Andrew Farach-Colton for its freshness, ardour and intimacy. The rhythmic vitality he found in Dvořák's Eighth pours out of the Dvořák symphony that I hear them play, the Seventh, which will be paired on record with Brahms's most relaxed symphony, the Second.

The relationship between the two composers is well documented: Brahms saw himself as the mentor, with Dvořák

his encouraging – and pleasingly worshipful – protégé.

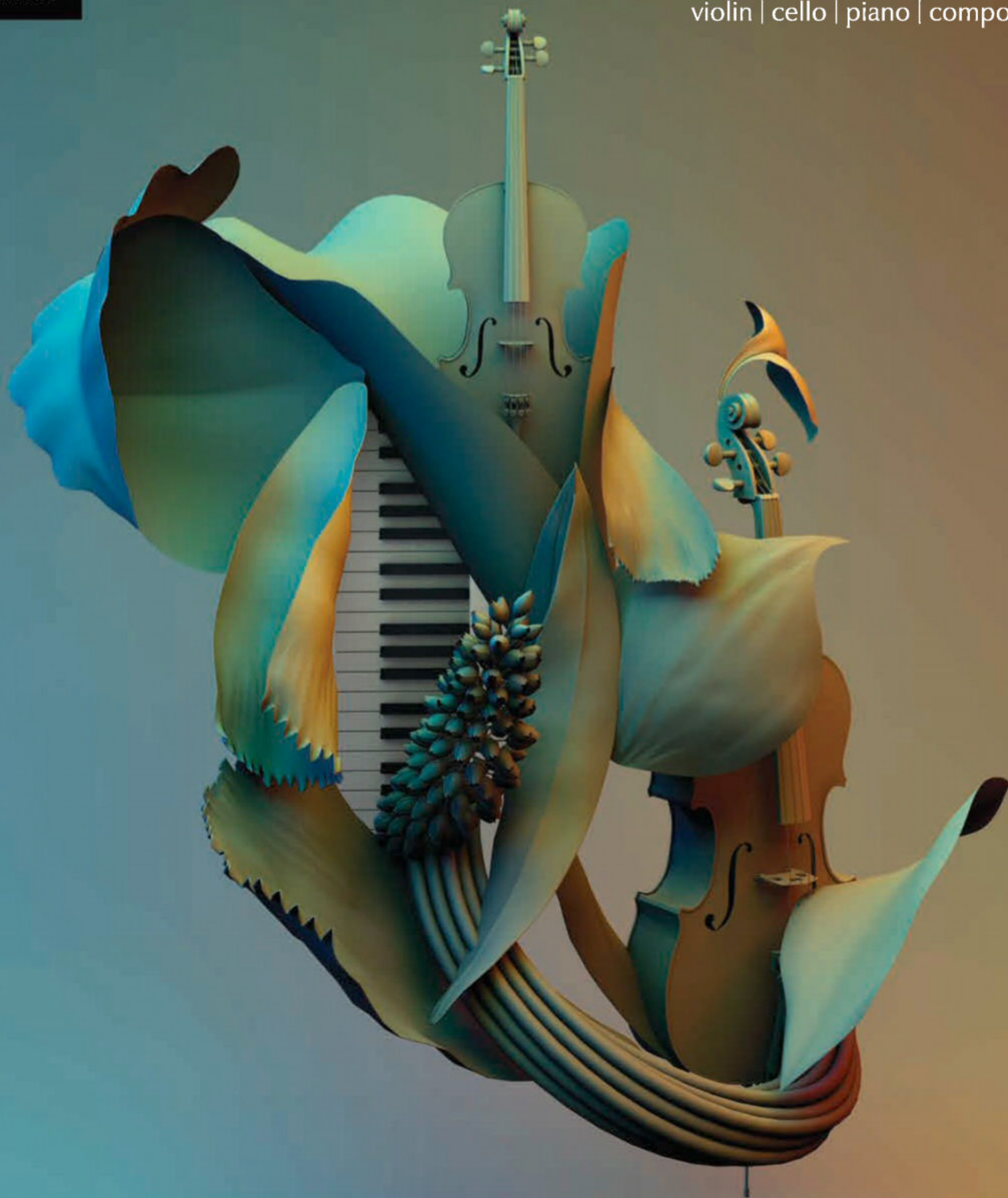
'Brahms was extremely critical of many talented people who, as he said, had no rigour,' Hrůša observes. 'He destroyed so many students by uttering cynical remarks about them.' But Brahms's single-mindedness, he argues, had positive effects on the Czech composer. 'He didn't think of him as a rival. They had such different personalities – one was a believer, one a sceptic, one a family man, one not. Brahms was a town kid, Dvořák from the country ... Brahms sensed that otherness, supported Dvořák, criticised him – and the Symphony No 7 is the climax of what Dvořák achieved, thanks to this relationship.'

There was a special piquancy to Hrůša's appointment to the orchestra in 2016. This may be an ensemble cherished by its



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Beauty in life



'A beautiful hall to work in': Jakub Hruša conducts his orchestra in the Bamberg Konzerthalle's Joseph-Keilberth-Saal

audience and nestled happily in its bosom, yet Bamberg didn't actually have a symphony orchestra until a group of exiled musicians turned up at its gates in 1945. The orchestra's roots had previously been put down in what is now the Czech Republic, its beginnings traceable to the orchestra of what is now known as the Estates Theatre in Prague (it can therefore claim to have given the premiere of *Don Giovanni* in 1787), which eventually evolved into the Prague German Philharmonic.

During the Second World War, when Czechoslovakia was dismembered and a brutal occupation was enforced by the Nazis over Bohemia and Moravia, it was business as usual for this orchestra, then led by Joseph Keilberth. After the war, its ethnically German players, like other Germans in the country, were expelled. On the road through Bavaria, they passed the ruins of Nuremberg, where there was nothing for them. But Bamberg had been spared Allied bombing. 'There was no orchestra here already,' explains Axt, 'and next to no destruction – so refugees like them could have a chance at getting apartments. There was an old church where they could rehearse. They had toured here twice already in the early 1940s.' The orchestra had found a berth. Axt suggests the city itself

must have seemed 'like a mini Prague: the cathedral on the hill, the medieval houses, the river. Beer of the same quality – maybe better'.

Hruša, the orchestra's first Czech Chief Conductor, might not go along with all of that (especially the bit about the beer), but he finds the cultural connection a point of inspiration even if he says it would be an oversimplification to talk of some kind of 'Czech tradition' seeping through the decades. 'I think there is a sense of continuity, which has been passed through the generations. It creates an even more natural set-up for our collaboration, in terms of the orchestra's and the world's understanding of why our bond seems to function so naturally.

It's roots against "new" history, as if two distant relatives discover each other and realise what they have in common. Of course, it's a beautiful item for PR, and people now try to squeeze out such unnatural ways of promoting stuff. But we have something genuinely natural.'

No project better reflects the new dynamic between orchestra and conductor than the Bambergers' triumphant tour last year with Smetana's hymn to Czech folklore and history, *Ma vlast* ('My Country'). In May 2019, the orchestra began its journey with the piece, including performing



Steeped in the city's history: the orchestra in front of Bamberg's Baroque Neue Residenz



From left: engineer Sidney Meyer, Hrůša, Axt, Markus Stratmann and producer Rainer Maillard admire the new LP

it at the inauguration of the Prague Spring festival – being only the third foreign orchestra to do so since the annual tradition began (the piece was regularly programmed from the festival's foundation in 1946, and from 1952 it was always featured in the opening concert). A tour of 12 more cities followed, finishing with a concert at the BBC Proms which Richard Morrison hailed in *The Times* as 'a stunning 80 minutes, conducted entirely from memory by Hrůša: idiomatic, impassioned, blazing with energy and power, virtuosically played, and enthrallingly pictorial'.

Despite his youth (he is 38), Hrůša is a seasoned interpreter of the work. (He keeps a meticulous record of all his performances of any of the sections of *Má vlast*, and this handwritten list is reproduced in the Bambergers' current season brochure.) But even if the work is totemic in Czech culture, Hrůša says, 'A lot of Czech orchestras play it simply automatically – they don't question it any more. Of course, if they're motivated and have a good conductor they do it splendidly. I've done it with the Czech Philharmonic as well, and it was a different, but great, experience. But this one with the Bamberg Symphony was really great fun.'

'In direct-to-disc recording you can't edit, you can't divide the pieces into sections – you have to play it through' – Jakub Hrůša

Hrůša took the decision to double the parts. 'I had various reasons for this,' he says, 'but it simply meant that nearly every single member of the orchestra went to Prague with the piece. We really enjoyed it, and we had a great party afterwards. I had a little concern – which I didn't admit to – that after the Prague Spring festival we wouldn't be able to develop the piece, but in the end I think the Proms performance was the nicest.'

Yet still this wasn't the actual end. The orchestra then came home and teamed up with Accentus Music for the sort of laborious, back-to-basics process that perhaps only a rare-breed-potato farmer might understand. This was a direct-to-disc recording of *Má vlast*, using a technique – standard until the late 1940s – whereby the microphones are directly connected to the cutting machine. With each of the

six sections of *Má vlast* fitting on one side of an LP, the result is a three-LP box-set, 1000 numbered copies of which are being released exclusively on vinyl this spring. The sting? With direct-to-disc, there is no patching, no editing, no remastering – the orchestra had to keep their cool in order to come out with six 'perfect enough' takes of the movements.

This was a challenge in several respects. For one thing, the recording was done in 40-degree heat during the summer. 'The management even booked a van full of ice cream to cool down the musicians!' laughs Hrůša. The conductor, who is something of a stickler for formality, wore a pair of shorts during the process ('I apologised, because it was strongly against my conservative sense of conducting'), but mainly agonised over the tricky business of what was good enough to make the final recording.

'The situation was new for everyone. You can't edit, but you can't even divide the pieces into sections – you have to play it through. And if something goes wrong, the conductor basically has to decide whether to stop or let it be. Imagine if the piece is going in the most superb way, you're really happy with what's going on – and then comes a flaw ...' And with repeating come further risks – of greater mistakes from tired arms or tired lips. '*Má vlast* is extremely tiring physically. It's not apparent when you listen, but people are destroyed after a performance of it.'

Nonetheless, Hrůša says he was amazed at the concentration the players gave him. 'It triggered the best possible self-confidence in the orchestra. So, except for the heat, it was a very joyful couple of days.' The backup plan – that if all went to pot, they would just produce souvenir editions of 'Vltava', the most famous of the six symphonic poems – didn't need to be employed.

Axt is delighted with the result of the experiment, likening the sound quality (only two sets of microphones were used, in the authentic style) to 'an old wooden and gold frame'. The project has extra resonance for him and his colleagues, because the orchestra only recently gained access to the archive of the old Prague German Philharmonic, which had been buried in a Czech vault, locked away for decades behind the Iron Curtain. Axt had long assumed that the earliest recordings the orchestra made in the 1940s under Keilberth had been destroyed: 'They had every reason to put them in the dustbin.' Yet there they were, preserved for more than 70 years. The orchestra was thus reunited with some more of its history, its roots. 'It touches me very much,' says Axt. And these, too, were recordings made direct-to-disc, fired by adrenalin and stamina.

Such technicalities may not leave every classical-music lover so misty-eyed. Yet in an environment as nurturing and devoted as Bamberg, a touch of lovable nerdiness is rarely far away. Hrůša and the orchestra are already planning their next project to follow Brahms and Dvořák: Bruckner's Fourth Symphony, in three versions, joined together on one compare-and-contrast album. 'It will make you listen with different ears,' promises Hrůša. And if there is a whiff of eccentricity here, it's an endearing idea. It will surely make the players sweat again, whatever the weather. **G**

*Jakub Hrůša and the Bamberg Symphony's next album of Brahms and Dvořák is due for release in the autumn on Tudor. Their direct-to-disc *Má vlast* is out this spring on Accentus, on vinyl only*



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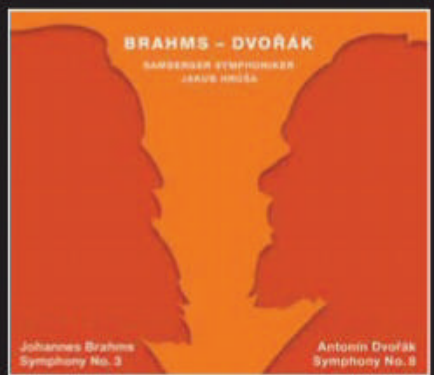
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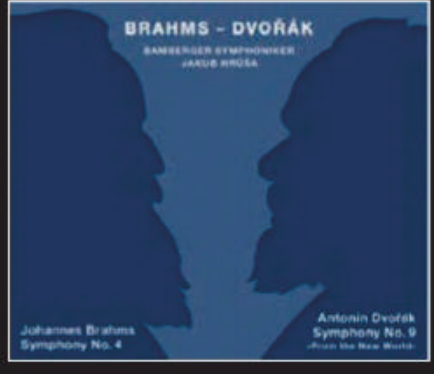
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GRAMOPHONE

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Harriet Smith hails Benjamin Grosvenor's colourful and refined pianism in Chopin's piano concertos, and his superb partnership with the conductor Elim Chan



Chopin

Piano Concertos - No 1, Op 11; No 2, Op 21

Benjamin Grosvenor *pf*

Royal Scottish National Orchestra / Elim Chan

Decca © 485 0365 (71' • DDD)

I haven't been this struck by the orchestral expositions to Chopin's concertos since Jun Märkl with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra for Ingrid Fliter. Now in the company of another Scottish orchestra, the RSNO, Elim Chan makes equally bold decisions about how the music should go. It's easy to understand why they appointed her Principal Guest Conductor in 2018 after she'd stood in for an indisposed Neeme Järvi the previous year.

In the E minor First Concerto's opening exposition the mere fact of having a symphony rather than chamber orchestra gives it a natural weight, and into the mix Elim Chan injects not only a passionate urgency but also a bounce to the rhythms. Suddenly you're aware that this concerto comes out of a Beethovenian tradition, a quality emphasised in the lyrical second theme which here has a straightforwardly Classical underlying pulse, with none of the rubato that can over-romanticise it. The flute melody here is certainly not underpowered but it emerges naturally, and the brass are full of character. It's all a world away from Zimerman's dangerously drawn-out view of the movement. What's also abundantly apparent throughout these performances is that the orchestral musicians are galvanised by Chan – not always a given in these concertos.

When Benjamin Grosvenor finally makes his first entrance, it proves well worth the wait, and his playing beguiles from the off; as the dynamics sink, his lines are full



'Grosvenor is a master of the sung line, and the way he deals with Chopin's ornamentation has a rare inevitability about it'

of poetry but they unfold with utter naturalness. Chan follows his every gesture unerringly – there's no doubting the musical chemistry at play here. And that brings me to another point: Grosvenor has always balanced his solo career with chamber music-making and it really

shows – just sample the way he duets so subtly with the bassoon (track 1, from 10'32"). But he's not afraid to command the stage either – the upward scales in thirds and sixths (from 11'26") have a feisty brilliance to them. Even the points that can sound like mere passagework in some performances are lovingly brought alive, Grosvenor constantly recolouring the lines or reweighting the textures with endless imagination.

For the *Romanze* the strings set the tone with what sounds to be a minimal vibrato, and again the feeling is of glorified chamber music, the piano within the texture rather than dominating it. Grosvenor is a master of the sung line, and the way he deals with Chopin's phantasmagoric ornamentation has a rare inevitability about it. The link to the finale (track 2, from 7'30") is particularly breathtaking, with each of the piano's harmonic shifts sounding bell-like and crystalline; as the orchestra creeps back in, Grosvenor responds with phrases that are coloured with such variety that it's as if we're hearing them for the very first time.

The F minor Second Concerto is every bit as outstanding, with Grosvenor and Chan bringing out not only the work's songfulness but also making us aware of the inner lines and Chopin's contrapuntal thinking. In the opening movement, listen to the way he seems to have all the time in the world for the ornamentation of the lyrical second theme that was initially presented on woodwind (track 4, from 4'56"). It's a reminder of the sheer delicacy of his playing, and the movement as a whole has many moments of sheerly luminous playing, its innate wistfulness beautifully brought out.



Grosvenor's virtuosity is always at the service of the music



Spontaneous ease: Benjamin Grosvenor and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra under conductor Elim Chan bring a classical poise to Chopin

The heartfelt slow movement (inspired by the young Chopin's unspoken love for Konstancja Gładkowska, his classmate at the Warsaw School of Music) is as ravishing as anyone's, the tempo just right for Grosvenor to spin Chopin's ever-more extravagantly filigree lines with an apparently spontaneous ease, Chan responding unerringly to every dynamic shift. And how dramatic are the hushed string tremolos as the mood darkens (track 5, from 4'11").

After such tension, the finale comes as a delicious balance of extroversion with playfulness, Grosvenor's virtuosity always at the service of the music, easing into the passage with *col legno* violins and violas (track 6, 2'08") with insouciant inevitability. On every hearing new details

seem to emerge – the most delicate trilling here, a wonderful snippet of clarinet theme there – but always with a sense of storytelling, Chopin's ever-shifting moods lustrously caught. The point where we move to the major (from 6'50") is gloriously uplifting, and the lyrical interjection just before the close again unerringly judged by all.

Benjamin Grosvenor has also been blessed with a very fine instrument and a fabulous recording. It's the kind of disc that makes you rethink these works and appreciate them all over again. And let's hope that this is the start of a wonderful recording partnership with Elim Chan. **G**

Selected comparisons – coupled as above:

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Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral



Tim Ashley immerses himself in the music of Fernand de La Tombelle:

'The Fantaisie for piano and orchestra, with a deeply felt slow movement and a dazzling finale, is a terrific piece' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 44**



Richard Whitehouse hears the symphonies of Heinz Winbeck:

'Early, quirkily subversive pieces gave little inkling Winbeck might embrace this most historically loaded of genres' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 48**

Abrahamsen • Pesson • Strasnoy

Abrahamsen Left, Alone^a **Pesson** Future is a Faded Song^b **Strasnoy** Kuleshov^c
Alexandre Tharaud *pf*^a **Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra** / **Tito Ceccherini**; ^b**Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra** / **Yannick Nézet-Séguin**; ^c**Les Violons du Roy** / **Mathieu Lussier**
Erato © 9029 53230-7 (63' • DDD)
Recorded live at ^aClité de la Musique, Paris, December 8, 2012; ^bDe Doelen, Rotterdam, December 9, 2016; ^cSalle Bourgie du Musée des Beaux-Arts, Montreal, June 2, 2017



Alexandre Tharaud has been nothing if not enterprising over his choice of

repertoire, and this is equally evident in the commissioning of new works, as these three concertos fully confirm.

Hans Abrahamsen has spoken of how not having a fully functional right hand influenced his approach to the piano. Not that his piece pits soloist against orchestra; rather, each gradually sizes up the other, ultimately finding common cause in their fleeting entente. A concept that is tailor-made for Tharaud, who renders the solo part with that deftness, even insouciance that has long been an Abrahamsen trait.

Nor is there any reservation about his playing in the other pieces, whatever doubts may surface as to content. Taking its title from a TS Eliot quotation and its cue from an undisclosed plan that Mauricio Kagel had for a concerto, Gerard Pesson places the soloist's abstract gestures in a milieu of half-remembered stylisms that intrigue but seldom absorb, save for the emergence of a second piano as 'anti-soloist' during the climactic stages.

Oscar Strasnoy's title is that of the Soviet film-maker Lev Kuleshov, whose theories about the cinematic enhancement of a chosen image are realised in musical terms via an amalgam of rondo and variation that yields

distinctive imagery if a less than compelling overall trajectory.

Each orchestra and conductor partnership seems fully attuned to their appreciably different accompanying roles, enhanced by vivid and lifelike recording, with succinct commentary by each composer. Worth investigating, even if only the Abrahamsen is likely to prove a 'stayer'. **Richard Whitehouse**

Beethoven

Piano Concertos - No 2, Op 19;
No 5, 'Emperor', Op 73
Kristian Bezuidenhout *fp* **Freiburg Baroque Orchestra** / **Pablo Heras-Casado**
Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2411 (63' • DDD)



One of the choicest offerings thus far this celebratory Beethoven year is the powerfully

compelling collaboration of Kristian Bezuidenhout and Pablo Heras-Casado with the Freiburger Barockorchester in the Second and Fifth Piano Concertos. Bezuidenhout has a long, fruitful relationship with Freiburg (you can hear them in a live Mozart K453 on YouTube.) Add to the mix the lively imagination of Heras-Casado, the Freiburgers playing their hearts out, plus expert sound as clean as you're likely to come across in 2020, and you have the makings of a hot recording.

Bezuidenhout plays a replica of an 1824 Graf, built by Rodney Regier in 1989. For the *Emperor*, the orchestra use eight first and seven second violins, five violas, four cellos and three double basses, plus pairs of winds; for Op 19 one player fewer in each string section, minus a flute, trumpets, and timpani. It might be tempting to say the instruments don't matter, so robustly dynamic is the music-making. But of course the use of original instruments informs everything they do. Tempos are decidedly brisk, without ever seeming rushed. Their sound is big, bold and simply luminous in its detailed richness.

Listeners familiar with Bezuidenhout's solo Mozart recordings (2010-16) or his Beethoven sonatas with Viktoria Mullova (Onyx, 9/10) may have some inkling of what's in store. Certainly discerning intelligence and imagination, qualities we've come to expect from Bezuidenhout, are here in abundance. But other attributes – his playful sense of the improvisatory, his ready ear for humour, not to mention his ability to imbue every gesture with emotional authenticity – seem particularly suited to the concertos: Beethoven, after all, often played their premieres before he'd had time to completely write out the solo part.

Meanwhile, there's nothing quite like the company of like-minded individuals. In addition to creating sounds of startling beauty – the entrance of the horns at the end of the cadenza in the *Emperor*! – Heras-Casado and the orchestra seem intent on letting Beethoven be Beethoven. Rhythmic displacements, explosive *sforzandos*, disarming dynamic contrasts and pleading sincerity juxtaposed with brutally emphatic insistence create a sense of the astonishment and delight that Viennese audiences, accustomed to Haydn, Mozart, Salieri and Gluck, must have experienced hearing Beethoven for the first time.

In the aggregate, careful and conscious consideration of every detail of these brilliant scores paradoxically leaves the impression of complete surrender and abandon to the spirit of the music. I doubt that Beethoven, at least recently, has sounded quite so original or so much fun.

And what could possibly be better? Well, turns out this is but the first instalment of a concerto cycle. The Fourth Concerto, along with overtures, is scheduled for release in August; the *Choral Fantasy* and the Ninth Symphony for September; and the First and Third Concertos are due in late 2021. I can't wait. **Patrick Rucker**



Clarity, balance and rhythmic verve: Andrew Manze directs the NDR Radiophilharmonie in tremendous accounts of Beethoven's Fifth and Seventh Symphonies

Beethoven

'Resound, Vol 8'

Symphonies - No 5, Op 67; No 6, 'Pastoral', Op 68

Vienna Academy Orchestra / Martin Haselböck

Alpha ⑤ ALPHA479 (80' • DDD)

Beethoven

Symphonies - No 5, Op 67^a; No 7, Op 92^b

NDR Radiophilharmonie / Andrew Manze

Pentatone ⑤ PTC5186 814 (74' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at the Grosser Sendesaal,
NDR Landesfunkhaus, Hanover, ^aJanuary 21-23,

^bMarch 11-14, 2019



For the final instalment of the 'Resound Beethoven' series, recorded in Viennese venues that survive from the composer's day, Martin Haselböck and his period-instrument orchestra return to the resonant acoustic of the Landhaus Hall in the Palais Niederösterreich where the series began. Alpha's engineers seem to have placed the microphones a bit further from the orchestra this time, so at the very opening of the Fifth, for example, the

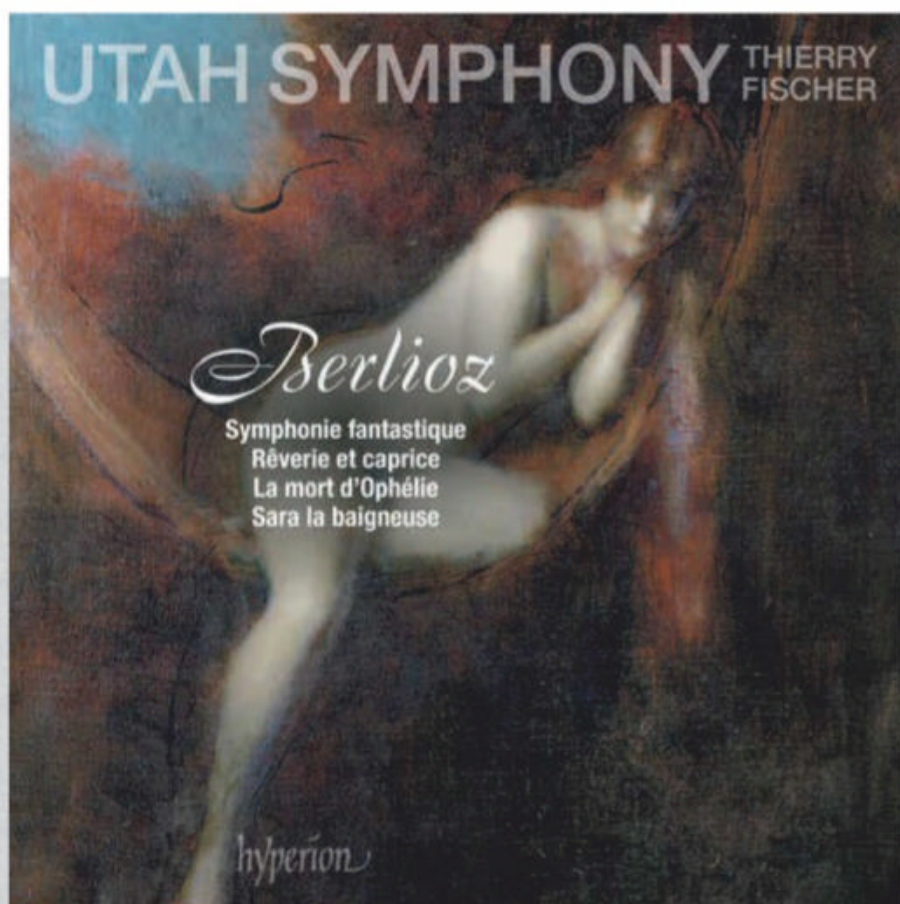
octave D held in the second fermata hasn't even time to die away before the second violins begin their breathless chase. I believe this aural remove also accounts, at least in part, for the gaunt tone of the Vienna Academy's strings.

As for the performances themselves, there are moments of rhythmic instability here and there, as well as some odd interpretative choices on Haselböck's part, as when the strings enter under tempo following the oboe's cadenza in the first movement, or in the finale, where the return of the Scherzo is played considerably faster than in its original context. There are admirable attributes, too, certainly. The Scherzo's Trio strides ahead with exuberant resolve, for example, and the orchestra dig into the finale with grit and gusto. On the whole, however, I find the Sixth decidedly more persuasive. Haselböck hews close to Beethoven's metronome marking in the first movement but phrases in long lines (reflecting the slow-changing harmonies), so there's a surprisingly easy and natural sense of forward motion. The 'Scene by the Brook' is tender and exceptionally delicate – note, for instance, the sliver of violin tone at 2'31" that seems to float on the water's silvery surface – and the peasants make

merry with relish. What a pity the final *Allegretto* lumbers so prosaically.

The Pentatone disc offers interpretations of a more traditional slant. Andrew Manze appears to be unconcerned with the metronome markings, although the performances are hardly wanting for power or propulsion where called for. The finale of the Seventh, for instance, goes faster even than the already zippy metronome mark, and is tremendously exciting. It's also quite graceful in its way, thanks in large part to Manze's scrupulous attention to dynamic indications and articulation. Indeed, there's an exceptional lightness of touch in much of this Symphony – sample the spring and sparkle of the dotted rhythms in the first movement's *Vivace* or the nimbleness and unexpected delicacy of the third-movement *Presto*.

The Fifth has similar attributes in terms of clarity, balance and rhythmic verve but is in no way 'Beethoven light', as some historically informed performances have been labelled. Note, say, how the distinct sense of monumentality Manze brings to the opening *Allegro con brio* comes without any sacrifice of its essential impetus, and also how the space he gives the music to breathe allows the orchestra to play the second theme at a true *dolce*.



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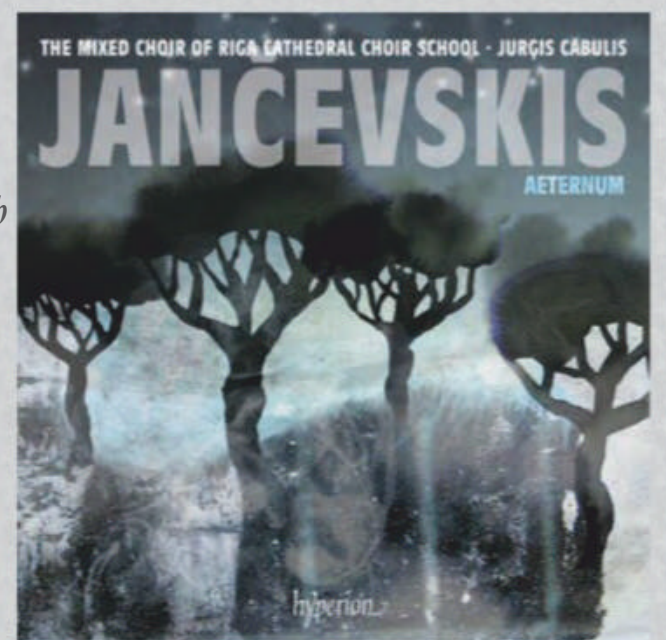
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I like very much, too, how expressively he highlights the shift of metric emphasis in the slow movement's melody, and the lyrical strain he finds in the granitic veins of the finale.

Honestly, it's been a while since I've heard interpretations where everything seems to be in its right place. The NDR Radiophilharmonie play superbly for Manze, with characterful woodwind solos, welcome hints of period bite from brass and timpani, and a string tone of substantial body and lustre. The engineering, too, is beyond reproach. Enthusiastically recommended. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

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Britten The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra, Op 34^a **Prokofiev** Peter and the Wolf, Op 67^b **Ravel** Ma Mère l'Oye^b **Saint-Saëns** The Carnival of the Animals^b

Britten-Pears Orchestra / Marin Alsop narr

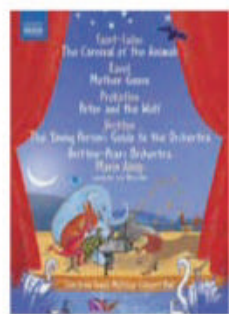
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(99' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Maltings, Snape, Suffolk,

^aApril 12-15, 2017; ^bAugust 3-5, 2018



What an attractive programme this is, the DVD cover an alluring bright red, vivid orange and sky blue, Marin Alsop (conductor and narrator) and 'Live from the Snape Maltings Concert Hall, Aldeburgh, Suffolk, UK'. What a delightful prospect for children and adults alike! No matter that the French title of the opening work, *Le carnaval des animaux*, is given incorrectly throughout the booklet and on the back of the DVD.

Within five minutes of the start of said opening work your reviewer was halfway up his study wall watching Marin Alsop's close-up delivery of the introductory linking text. Clearly edited in before or after the 'live performance', reading a narration is frankly not an aspect of her career she should pursue. If she persists, I would advise the use of an autocue – and then ask someone for direction. There is a skill and technique to it which she has yet to acquire. The newly written links themselves consist of witless, rambling verses that fall some way between a greetings card and William McGonagall. If they are supposed to be gently amusing, there is no indication that the audience found them so.

Oh yes. The music. It is very well recorded (as are all the items here) and

the performance is good enough without being outstanding. The pianists are genuinely funny in 'Pianistes', though shamefully unnamed in the booklet, as is the soloist in 'The Swan'. So let me tell you they are respectively Hayley Parkes and Kelly Lenehan; and cello soloist Ülker Tümer. But why the charmless cuckoo, and why is it not played offstage? An inexpensive app from Naxos allows you to access the verses which you can hear integrated with the music. It might offer a better experience.

Ma Mère l'Oye gives the young players of the Britten-Pears Orchestra the opportunity to shine (again, nothing about them in the booklet) with firm and confident strings. Thankfully, there is no narration. *Peter and the Wolf*, on the other hand, has Marin Alsop's (minimal) adaptation of Prokofiev's text narrated in the same fashion as *Carnival* but shot in a way that makes the 'live performance' claim even less credible.

Finally comes Britten's *Young Person's Guide*. It's the best thing here – vivid, highly commendable playing from the youngsters in a performance that captures all the colour and exuberance of this deservedly popular score. Marin Alsop's slightly rewritten version of Eric Crozier's dry-as-dust original text is just about appealing enough to engage most young persons.

Filmed over seven days in April 2017 and August 2018, and with subtitles in French, German, Japanese and Korean, I'm sure this DVD, which comes with a first-rate booklet by Jonathan Woolf (*sic*), will sell like hot cakes.

Jeremy Nicholas

Copland · Dvořák

Copland Billy the Kid – Suite **Dvořák** Symphony No 9, 'From the New World', Op 95 B178

National Symphony Orchestra, Washington DC / Gianandrea Noseda

John F Kennedy Center (F) NS00001 (63' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at the John F Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington DC, June 6, 8 & 9, 2019



A brand-new label showcasing both the National Symphony Orchestra and their home – the Kennedy Center – in Washington DC offers two familiar postcards 'From the New World' in performances that should but don't stand out from the crowd. The venue sounds well

enough in what is clearly a well-engineered disc and the inimitable chord spacings that open Copland's *Billy the Kid* Suite certainly convey that sense of 'tall, wide and handsome' – a sense that, notwithstanding the Godfather of American music Charles Ives, the American orchestral sound essentially began here.

But the open, rather too well-homogenised (for my taste) sound picture contributes to a presentation of this music that, while slickly projected by the NSO and its music director Gianandrea Noseda, is somehow too urbane to be entirely in keeping with its frontier spirit, its homespun local colour, Mexican dances and the like. It feels and sounds like a rather expensive 21st-century pageant – a depiction of the famous outlaw and his milieu that heaven forbid should get down and dirty.

As we move into Dvořák's celebrated letter home from North America, it becomes more and more apparent to me that part of the reason why Noseda's reading feels overly generalised and short on personality is a sound picture that favours blend over detail. Rich and sonorous as it is, the whole thing is lacking litheness and rhythmic profile. I want to hear more definition in the brass, a sharper immediacy to the horns and trombones especially, and trumpets that really cut through the texture. Their exciting 'hairpins' in the coda of the first movement go for absolutely nothing.

But it's not just the sound that's the issue here. In a piece this familiar it's those 'personal' touches that make it live and breathe again, and in this slow movement one feels like one is standing back in admiration of the super-smooth brass chorale and well-upholstered cor anglais solo rather than being drawn afresh into the musical narrative. The middle section of this movement can and should tug at the heartstrings, as should the use of solo strings at the close. But it remains strangely impassive.

Again there is fire and resilience in the finale but little of the excitement it can muster. Both sonically and interpretatively I feel like I am at arm's length from everything. How much more exciting the harmonic interaction of trumpets against trombones against tremolando violins in the coda would be if there were not just more immediacy but a very real sense of the music over-reaching itself. These are respectable performances for a respectable audience but nothing whatever to frighten the horses.

Edward Seckerson

► See The Musician and The Score on page 50

GRAMOPHONE *Focus*

REVELATORY BRUCKNER

Peter Quantrill enjoys a decade of outstanding Bruckner from the Berlin Philharmonic – nine symphonies from eight conductors



Bernard Haitink brings a quizzical wonder to Bruckner's Fourth Symphony

Bruckner

Symphonies – No 1 (Linz version, 1865/66)^a; No 2 (1877 version)^b; No 3 (1872/73 version)^c; No 4, 'Romantic' (1878/80 version)^d; No 5^e; No 6^f; No 7 (1885 version)^g; No 8 (1890 version)^h; No 9 (compl Samale-Phillips-Cohrs-Mazzuca)ⁱ

Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra / ^eHerbert Blomstedt, ^{de}Bernard Haitink, ^fMariss Jansons, ^bPaavo Järvi, ^hZubin Mehta, ^aSeiji Ozawa, ⁱSir Simon Rattle, ^gChristian Thielemann

Berliner Philharmoniker (M) (9) + (4) (Blu-ray Disc)
BPHR190281 (9h 25' • DDD • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1). Recorded live at the Philharmonie, Berlin, 2009-19



Before conducting Bruckner's Eighth Symphony in December 2019, Zubin Mehta put his finger on the 'unbelievable flexibility' of the modern Berlin Philharmonic. He should know,

having led them more often than anyone else save their music directors. The turnover and rejuvenation of their personnel, the restoration of Bach and Haydn to their central repertoire and the collaborative work with early music's early-music moguls such as William Christie and Emmanuelle Haïm are all contributing factors. But what do they have to do with Bruckner, and with this luxury audiovisual package of nine symphonies and eight conductors recorded during the past decade?

For an answer, turn no further than the first disc. Seiji Ozawa has been a selective Brucknerian but his 2009 performance of the First quite surpasses that of his erstwhile mentor Karajan. The finale's intricate counterpoint was a product of the composer's long study with the Viennese theoretician Simon Sechter: under Ozawa it takes wing, coaxed into a form prefiguring the Fifth's mighty double fugue and voiced with a

transparency befitting one of Schubert's round-dance endings.

The remaining interpretations may be known quantities to Bruckner collectors – yes, including Paavo Järvi's Second – but none are the worse for that, and all nine bear a 'made in Berlin' stamp: of technical finesse in execution and engineering (more appreciable on the discreetly edited CDs and Blu-ray audio-only disc), of still-vital resplendence at points of long-anticipated exultation and, no less characteristically, of a dense, *sostenuto* string tone that maestros attempt to thin out at their peril. Järvi proceeds more boldly than his colleagues in this regard, but there's a tug of feeling to the violas' chromatic first entry in the *Adagio* that their Frankfurt RSO counterparts (on presently hard-to-find Japanese RCA) can't, or won't, emulate. The walking bass pizzicato is just a notch more resonant, the second theme a touch more supple and voluptuous, the chording a gnat's crotchet more exact, the complementary answers from lower winds a fraction more suggestive of a journeying pilgrim, and one less burdened by vice than Tannhäuser on his way to Rome.

In Berlin, all these readings are a little more – more present, more vivid, more everything – but also now markedly less Wagnerian than their rivals from a bygone era such as the portmanteau analogue-era cycle from Vienna reissued by Eloquence (11/19), if 'Wagnerian' may still be permissibly used once in a while as shorthand for the aural equivalent of schnitzel with potato dumplings. The Third, under Herbert Blomstedt, shares the 'trademark qualities of sensitivity and good sense' which Richard Osborne identified (11/13) in the conductor's Leipzig-based traversal of the nine numbered symphonies. Blomstedt has latterly lashed himself to the mast of the symphony's original 1873 version, and more convincingly so than any previous interpreter, though I still cavil at the first movement's arrested development for an extended reminiscence of *Die Walküre*.

All nine performances deserve a review to themselves. A Black Forest of teeming detail in the Fourth's Scherzo suddenly clears for a Trio full of quizzical wonder and a yearning never accessed by Bernard Haitink in his many previous recordings. By his and the set's Olympian standards the Fifth comes as a slight disappointment, in which majesty strikes the keynote over jeopardy long before the clinching

peroration. Introducing the Sixth, however, the late Mariss Jansons makes a moving and candid admission of experience – ‘I’ve reached the stage where I love the music madly’ – borne out by an intensity of feeling and purpose established from the outset and sustained through a sublime account of the *Adagio* – one of the finest things I’ve heard from Jansons for years – into a freshly conceived finale that does not strain for complete integration of its disparate materials.

Along related lines, I find myself more persuaded by Christian Thielemann’s highly personalised tempo schemes for the Seventh than were RO and Christian Hoskins, reviewing older recordings from Munich (8/10) and Dresden (7/16). A pulse on the move may sometimes take you where you would not go, but the Berliners’ flexibility of response – Mehta’s phrase again – allows the line to stretch without snapping. It is the woodwinds in particular, led by the oboists Albrecht Mayer and Jonathan Kelly, who help Thielemann to achieve the ‘paler, more understated colours’ that he now seeks in the Seventh, as much as they take their lead from Mehta’s own, considerably more understated direction (recorded back in 2012) to bring the architecture of the Eighth’s opening movement into focus, so that his broadening at the ‘death-watch’ climax hits home all the harder.

To the orchestra’s now-departed director is given the honour of the Ninth. More than the other maestros’ Berlin-accented refinements, Sir Simon Rattle’s 2018 performance diverges from his original EMI recording, tautening all four movements in the process of further integrating the now-authoritative completed finale with the familiar torso, and at some cost to its many bizarre and far-seeing harmonic disturbances, as well as to their final and overwhelming resolution. Still, it is in the nature of these symphonies that they remain work-in-progress for performers as they did for the composer. Thielemann talks of them as ‘a school for conductors’; all nine performances, as much as Richard Taruskin’s virtuoso booklet essay, should make an eager pupil of any listener willing to place themselves under Bruckner’s spell. The serious collector jaded by the prospect of ‘another’ Blomstedt Third or Haitink Fourth should probably give Bruckner a rest and listen to something else. **G**

Dessner

‘Tenebre’

Aheym. Lachrimae. Skrik Trio. Tenebre

Moses Sumney *sng* Ensemble Resonanz

Resonanzraum **Ⓢ** RRR002CD (58’ • DDD)



Bryce Dessner confessed to having been shocked by the precision and energy

of Ensemble Resonanz’s performances when he first heard them. However, the composer’s punchy post-minimalist style is in many ways ideally suited to this group’s uncompromising visceral power.

In the hands of Ensemble Resonanz, the two earliest works featured here – *Aheym* (2009) and *Tenebre* (2010) – become supercharged manifestations of the original versions for string quartet. Originally written for and recorded by the Kronos Quartet (Anti, 2013), *Aheym*’s opening pounding 13-note riff is given the full heavy-metal treatment by Resonanz, downbows applied with nerves of steel. The work’s edgy intensity is maintained throughout, eventually giving rise to a series of shuddering explosions at the end.

More subtle textural twists and turns are heard in *Tenebre*, trembling *sul ponticello* tremolandos whispering above a solemnly sustained melody in cellos and basses. Dessner’s fondness for textural build-ups is most evident here, and the addition of a tape part in the final section, featuring increasingly elaborate vocal patterns layered alongside divided strings, gives the music a rare rich opulence. A hovering unison heard at the end of *Lachrimae* (2012) provides further evidence of Dessner’s penchant for the unpredictable and unexpected.

Indeed, in between this piece and the most recent on the disc, *Skrik Trio* (2017), one imagines the composer to have experienced something of an avant-garde epiphany. Bartók-style pizzicatos pop and fizz against sharp rhythmic shards, sporadically punctuated with moments of flashing brilliance, often played in unison. Taut modular musical segments combined with energetic blocks of sound – qualities that once featured heavily in Dessner’s music – are now replaced with more elongated passages: paragraphs rather than pithy headlines, imparting a nervous narrative quality. With everything from Monteverdi to punk rock and minimalism providing grist to Dessner’s creative mill, it will be interesting to see what he comes up with next. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

Dukas · Roussel

Dukas *L’apprenti sorcier*. Polyeucte – Overture

Roussel *Le festin d’l’araignée*, Op 17

Pays de la Loire National Orchestra / Pascal Rophé

BIS **Ⓢ** BIS2432 (60’ • DDD/DSD)



The big news here – to me, at least, since I missed this same team’s Dutilleux disc

(BIS, 1/16) – is the superb quality of the Loire Orchestra. In the measured opening of Dukas’s *Polyeucte* Overture, the strings’ suppleness and firm tone immediately immerse one in a darkly radiant (and distinctly Franckian) atmosphere, and in the ensuing *Allegro*, Pascal Rophé whips up a roiling tempest (echoes of Wagner’s *Dutchman* here) without any sacrifice in clarity. Indeed, even in the most rhythmically involved and intricately scored passages of *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice*, every last detail is crystal clear – not surprising, perhaps, given that the conductor spent some of his early years working with Boulez and the Ensemble Intercontemporain. He keeps a tight grip on the tempo in the faster sections, lending a sense of inexorability and making sure every off-beat accent is where it’s supposed to be. Listen, say, to the crazily glittering swirls starting at 9’34”, where instead of the usual wash of sound one really can hear every note – it’s exquisite.

The orchestra’s performance of Roussel’s ballet *The Spider’s Feast* is similarly pellucid, revealing all the wonderfully elaborate strands and layers of its piquant scoring. And Rophé is just as meticulous in delineating character as he is in clarifying texture, establishing a thick air of expectation for the hatching of the mayfly, for example, and drawing richly expressive playing from the orchestra when the mayfly expires. There’s abundant charm here, too, as in the graceful phrasing of the little waltz at 1’15” in track 11. Stéphane Denève’s Naxos recording (3/12) is similarly characterful, but to my ears, the Loire Orchestra outshine the RSNO, and BIS’s recorded sound is quite simply spectacular. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Dupont · Benoit

‘The Romantic Piano Concerto, Vol 80’

Benoit *Symphonic Poem*, Op 43

Dupont *Piano Concerto No 3*, Op 49

Howard Shelley *pf*

St Gallen Symphony Orchestra

Hyperion **Ⓢ** CDA68264 (63’ • DDD)



Resisting any temptation to repeat old jokes about the lack of famous

Belgians, may I introduce to you, making his first appearance in these pages, (Pierre-) August Dupont (1827-90). Not to be confused with his brother Joseph, or Gabriel of that ilk (a Frenchman of some repute), or indeed other Dupont composers Pierre and Jean-Baptiste, our man spent most of his career in the Belgian capital 'establishing his reputation as a leading pianist and pedagogue', according to Jeremy Dibble's well-researched booklet.

Dupont seems to have written four piano concertos, though the present work is numbered No 3 and the others appear to be lost. I wish I could report that it is a rip-roaring, ear-tickling sensation in the manner of the best of the concertos enshrined in this important series. But if you are hoping for another Rubinstein Fourth, Scharwenka No 1 or 4, a Henselt or a Paderewski, you will be disappointed. The brooding first movement is more like a rhapsody. After several hearings I still found it impossible to make out its structure or remember any particular theme: it is full of sound and fury signifying, in my opinion, very little. The slow movement is the best of the three – a beautifully wrought elegy with some lovely writing but which soon meanders off on to side roads and overgrown paths before returning home. The finale is a dance movement of continually changing rhythms and motifs, the latter element remaining resolutely forgettable, though in the final pages Dupont summons the return of ideas from the earlier movements into a rousing coda. I found it a frustrating work to sit through.

Benoit's *Symphonic Poem* is a bit more like it. Peter Benoit (1834-1901), another forgotten figure, was, Dibble tells us, 'regarded as the founding father of the national movement to establish Flemish music in Belgium'. He was much influenced by Flemish folk song and legends (one Parisian critic dubbed him 'le Walter Scott de la musique'), as affirmed by the present work. A concerto in all but name, its three movements, 'Ballade', 'Bardic Song' and 'Scherzo – Fantastical Hunt', were inspired by folk tales concerning Harelbeke, Benoit's birthplace. Striking themes and colourful orchestral scoring complement the heroic gestures of the piano in the first movement, culminating in a massive cadenza. The

second movement opens, writes Dibble, 'with a melody of true pathos and sonority (reminiscent perhaps of Schumann's Romances for solo piano)'. The finale is a rumbustious and entertaining gallop, its main theme using a minor-key version of a Flemish folk song.

Once more, one can only marvel at Howard Shelley's industry in the triple role of musical archaeologist, conductor and pianist. It is not just the fluency, power and precision of his playing that elevates both scores but the little understated moments when he pulls back to let the music breathe with exquisitely sensitive phrasing. And all this from a musician who is shortly to celebrate his 70th birthday. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Goossens

'Orchestral Works, Vol 3'

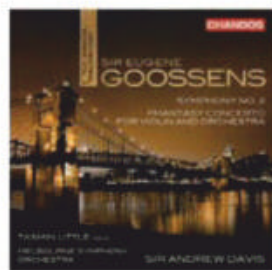
Phantasy Concerto, Op 63^a.

Symphony No 2, Op 62

^aTasmin Little *vn* Melbourne Symphony

Orchestra / Sir Andrew Davis

Chandos © CHSA5193 (68' • DDD/DSD)



It's been a decade since Chandos issued the first volume in this Goossens survey from

Melbourne (6/09). Andrew Achenbach greeted that release – with the late Richard Hickox conducting the First Symphony and *Phantasy Concerto* for piano and orchestra – with delight. I wish I shared his enthusiasm for Goossens's music, for neither that disc nor this new one under Andrew Davis give me much pleasure, although the performances on both are superbly accomplished and committed. There are striking passages scattered here and there, certainly, particularly in the Second Symphony (1945). The slow movement makes the most lasting impression, with moments of touching delicacy (try at 1'52") and a long, lyrical clarinet solo near the very end that demands rapt attention. But the harmonies have a restless, often aimless quality that make it difficult to follow the thread.

The same might be said for Goossens's melodic writing. Take the fugue subject in the Symphony's finale (at 3'59"), for example, which circles around awkwardly like a dog chasing its tail. Indeed, I'm not terribly surprised that Heifetz refused to play the concerto that Goossens composed at his request. It's not a virtuoso showpiece, but I don't believe that was the violinist's issue, as the solo part is kept front and centre throughout. Like its predecessor for piano, the highly changeable mood of this

Phantasy Concerto (1948, rev 1958) gives it its fantastical character. Its mood changes so rapidly, in fact, that it seems to thwart any real sense of any of its myriad ideas finding fulfilment.

One curious aspect of this pair of works (and those on the first volume, as well) is their colour, for they all suggest to me that they were written using the musical equivalent of black-and-white film. The shadings are fine and sharp, but it's all in greyscale nonetheless. This, combined with the music's slightly uneasy, ominous tone, wouldn't be out of place in the soundtrack to a 1940s detective film.

Again, the performances are superb. I prefer Davis's deliberate, determined tread in the Symphony's Scherzo to Handley's fleet tempo, even if the latter is closer to the composer's *giocoso* marking (ABC Classics, A/05). And Tasmin Little turns on a dime in the *Phantasy Concerto* – a premiere recording, I believe – holding the discursive score together as tautly as possible. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Gunning

Symphonies – No 2; No 10; No 12

BBC National Orchestra of Wales / Kenneth Woods

Signum © SIGCD593 (78' • DDD)



Numerous composers have secured their reputation through scores for film and

television, subsequently to attempt music for the concert hall in what proves to be an act of crass self-deception. Not so Christopher Gunning (b1944), whose 13 symphonies, numerous concertos and sundry orchestral pieces are as meticulously wrought as they are powerfully conceived.

From its obliquely Mahlerian start, the Tenth Symphony (2016) proceeds as a tautly argued single movement that takes in passages of contrasting lyricism and incisiveness; an understated if cumulative momentum sustained through to a plangent return of the opening music then a deftly Sibelian close. The Second Symphony (2002) evidently caused Gunning some trouble, but this is scarcely apparent over three movements that focus on ominous agitation, rapt contemplation and tense affirmation, the piano's insinuating presence typical of orchestration as resourceful as is Gunning's take on Classical formal archetypes. The composer considers his Twelfth Symphony (2018) one of relative relaxation, though this arguably undersells a first movement whose often ominous

Harbin launches 5th Schoenfeld International String Competition

UN-designated Music City also announced as first ever Chinese host of WFIMC General Assembly

The Schoenfeld International String Competition held a press conference on January 6, 2020 officially launching the 5th edition to take place July 15 to 29.

The press conference was made extra special by the presence of a delegation from the World Federation of International Music Competitions (WFIMC), an organization of more than 122 of the world's leading classical music competitions founded in 1957. The delegation featured Didier Schorkh, President, Peter Paul Kainrath, Vice President, and Florian Riem, Interim Secretary General. The visiting delegation announced that Schoenfeld and Harbin will play host to the WFIMC's 2023 General Assembly, marking the first time that the organization's most important annual event will take place in China.

The conference included the announcement that the biennial Schoenfeld International String Competition will now accept applications from outstanding young violinists, cellists, and chamber music groups for its summer 2020 edition. Representing the Harbin Municipal People's Government, the Director of the Harbin Cultural & Tourism Bureau announced that the Schoenfeld International String Competition will permanently reside in the city of Harbin. This significant commitment well illustrates the support and passion that the city's leaders have for the Schoenfeld Competition, and the unique connection Harbin City has to classical music.



Alice Schoenfeld in Harbin, 2016

The Schoenfeld International String Competition in Harbin built its excellent international reputation with the help of world-class artists who have served on the Competition's jury. Previous chairs include, Jean-Jacques Kantorow, David Geringas, Lynn Harrell, Shlomo Mintz, David Cerone, Jorge Mester, and Christoph Poppen. In 2018, the Schoenfeld Competition launched the innovative "Schoenfeld Deans and Art

"We, the World Federation of International Music Competitions, would like to applaud the Schoenfeld International String Competition in the beautiful Music City: Harbin, for their efforts in setting an exemplary standard to our industry."

Leaders' Summit," bringing together heads of the leading institutions, top journalists, artistic managers, concert curators, as well as local elites from related fields. These unique exchanges dealt with topics ranging from young artist career development, to the future of the elite music education, to the development of international music competition in the contemporary Chinese context.

Peter Paul Kainrath said at the conference, "A competition needs to be run by people close to the international music life, curious about future developments, ambitious to promote their own candidates in the best possible way, guiding them to the most unexpected way of a career development. And being now in China I have to underline the huge potential of this country offering probably the most interesting opportunities for a young musician to experience different kind of stages, of audiences and reactions."

Today, the Schoenfeld International String Competition is one of the most important competitions to covers two



Press conference of the Schoenfeld International String Competition 2020 at Harbin Concert Hall

major string disciplines and chamber music thanks in part to its membership in the World Federation of International Music Competitions. The success of the competition flows from the support of the local government and the vision of the Competition's artistic leadership since its founding in 2013.

Florian Riem noted that "In these times when everything is over-commercialized, we need to look at what competitions can bring out in an artist ... We, the World Federation of International Music Competitions, would like to applaud the Schoenfeld International String Competition in the beautiful Music City: Harbin, for their efforts in setting an exemplary standard to our industry."

The President of WFIMC, Didier Schnorhk said "The WFIMC believes that having its first General Assembly in China hosted by the Schoenfeld International String Competition in Harbin is a wonderful opportunity. Leaders of the musical world and delegates will come to this City and discover its openness to the world, they will understand more deeply the specificity of the Schoenfeld competition, and they will appreciate the benefits of intercultural understanding."

*Text by Yeung-ping CHEN
Chief Operating Officer, Schoenfeld
International String Competition & Associate
Professor, South China Normal University*

*For more information, please visit:
schoenfeldcompetition.com*



Suli Xue, Artistic Director of the Schoenfeld International String Competition and delegates from WFIMC

expectancy is countered by the suffused eloquence of its successor as it progresses towards an ending the more cathartic for its underlying tranquillity.

The BBC National Orchestra of Wales leave nothing to be desired, Kenneth Woods taking time out from his estimable 21st Century Symphony Project – which has already produced major compositions by Philip Sawyers (10/17), David Matthews (7/19) and Matthew Taylor – to deliver readings of audible conviction and insight. Cordially recommended, with the hope that Gunning's Eighth, Ninth, Eleventh and Thirteenth Symphonies will themselves soon be recorded.

Richard Whitehouse

S Hayden

Relative Autonomy^a. Substratum^b. Transience^c
^aDiotima Quartet; ^aEnsemble Musikfabrik /
 Stefan Asbury; ^bBBC Symphony Orchestra /
 David Robertson
 NMC © NMCD247 (70' • DDD)



My first introduction to Sam Hayden's music was in the back room of a

low-ceilinged bar at the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival sometime in the late 1990s, where [rout] – the ensemble he established with fellow composers Paul Newland and Paul Whitty – blew away the cobwebs that clung to contemporary music with performances that were high in physical intensity and volume.

Two of the works featured on this disc, *Relative Autonomy* and *Substratum*, capture some of the pressurised energy of that concert. Premiered at the Proms in 2007, *Substratum* for large orchestra kicks off with fierce explosions of sound, endlessly remoulded and reshaped across a 25-minute timespan in what Hayden has described as the 'proliferation of self-similar materials'. The work brings to mind the low-lying, densely shifting textures of Birtwistle's *Earth Dances* and slowly evolving contours of Finnis's *Red Earth*, although the music's sonic imprint is unmistakably Hayden's own.

By contrast, an almost brittle pointillism characterises *Relative Autonomy* for 16 players – persistent, concentrated bursts often high up in the instruments' registers that continually threatening to crack open its surface. The idea is developed still further in the 30-minute, seven-movement *Transience* for string quartet, completed in 2014. Dedicated to Hayden's teacher, Jonathan Harvey, the work displays what

Björn Heile refers to in an excellent set of booklet notes as the strongly gestural qualities that manifest themselves, where 'gesture' means not only the movements of the musicians themselves but also the musical shapes they produce. Quatuor Diotima manage this very well, producing a highly sculpted and crafted performance. These gestures take on more percussive forms on the bonus track *Die Abkehr*, available as a free download via NMC's online store.

While Hayden's aesthetic often generates highly animated, complex and concentrated structures, subdued moments also filter through in the string quartet, recalling earlier, more spectral-inspired works such as *Presence/absence* and *Partners in Psychopathology*: proof, perhaps, that the gestural substrata revealed in these works still hold future riches for the composer to mine. Pwyll ap Siôn

Haydn • C Stamitz

Haydn Concertos for Two Lire organizzate (Flute and Oboe) and Orchestra^a – No 1, HobVIIh:1; No 3, HobVIIh:3 C Stamitz Flute Concerto in G. Concerto for Flute, Oboe and Orchestra in D^a

Ana de la Vega fl ^aRamón Ortega Quero ob
 Trondheim Soloists / Geir Inge Lotsberg
 Pentatone © PTC5186 823 (65' • DDD)



The lira organizzata was, as described by Richard Wigmor, 'a high-tech hurdy-gurdy with sympathetic strings and an inbuilt miniature organ'. Haydn was commissioned in the mid-1780s to compose a handful of concertos for a pair of these odd instruments, which were an obsession of the Bourbon King of Naples and the Two Sicilies, Ferdinand IV. Like that other royal fad, the baryton (what is it with 18th-century aristos and sympathetic strings?), it was one man's folly and a flash in the pan, but the five surviving concertos proved a fertile source for Haydn's later music: one of them was plundered for material for Symphony No 89, while the slow movement of No 3, recorded here, achieved immortality as the *Allegretto* of the *Military* Symphony.

Haydn himself made versions with the two lire replaced by flute and oboe, the way in which they are most commonly performed today (which is to say, not often). For instruments of such limited chromatic ability, Haydn's harmonic shifts are particularly striking, and it's instructive, when they are placed in such close

proximity to a flute concerto and a double concerto by Carl Stamitz (1745-1801), to note Haydn's superior ability to sidestep the obvious and the clichéd. Stamitz's music is eminently competent and likeable but relies on stock progressions, sequences and passages in thirds in a way Haydn's music specifically doesn't.

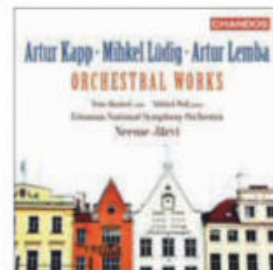
Both soloists and their accompanists, one of Norway's leading chamber ensembles, are known from previous well-received recordings in these pages. They play all this undemanding music (for the listener, at least) with ideal pose and balance.

David Thresher

Kapp • Lemba • Lüdig

Kapp Symphony No 4, 'Youth Symphony'. The Last Confession^a Lemba Piano Concerto No 1^b Lüdig Midsummer Night. Overture-Fantasies – No 1; No 2

^aTriin Ruubel vn ^bMihkel Poll pf Estonian National Symphony Orchestra / Neeme Järvi
 Chandos © CHAN20150 (73' • DDD)



This is a fascinating survey of Estonian orchestral music by composers born

towards the end of the 19th century showing its distinctly Russian heritage, as Aare Tool's informed and informative booklet notes point out. We open with the *Overture-Fantasy* No 2 (1945) by Mihkel Lüdig (1880-1958), an impressive blend of the St Petersburg and Nordic traditions in pursuit of something genuinely Estonian. Lüdig was a talented man, an impresario and organist as well as a composer, and at one time tried to make a career as an organist in Argentina. Also on this recording are his rather earlier *Midsummer Night* (1910) and *Overture-Fantasy* No 1 (1906), both similarly impressive, though perhaps the first of these is the most memorable, being an evocation of the mysterious atmosphere of the summer solstice, an event of great importance in Estonian culture. Lüdig's skill as an orchestrator is much in evidence, as is his employment of Estonian folk melody.

Artur Lemba (1885-1963) was a star graduate of the St Petersburg Conservatory, where he later taught, and is a significant figure in the history of Estonian music, having composed both the first Estonian symphony and the first Estonian opera. His Piano Concerto No 1 (1905, rev 1910) is full of the kind of writing one might expect from a piano virtuoso deeply familiar with the Russian Romantic tradition, and has remained

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popular. Soloist Mihkel Poll makes a highly convincing case for it, and it is clearly meat and drink to the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra under Neeme Järvi's sure direction. The slow second movement is perhaps the most memorable but it would not be impossible to imagine this work making inroads into concert repertoire more widely.

The Last Confession (also 1905) by Artur Kapp (1878-1952) is rather different. It was originally written for violin and organ. In this version for violin and orchestra, the soloist is Triin Ruubel. Kapp was an organist (and later to become a revered teacher of composition), and his interest in Bach is evident here, though one wouldn't describe it as unromantic. One could hardly have imagined at that time that in 1948 the composer would write his Symphony No 4 and dedicate it to the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League on its 30th anniversary. It is a strikingly lean, declamatory work (an alternative subtitle for it is *Classical Symphony*), but it nevertheless still has recourse to Estonian folk music: the music, one has the impression, of a man seeking for sunlight in political darkness. **Ivan Moody**

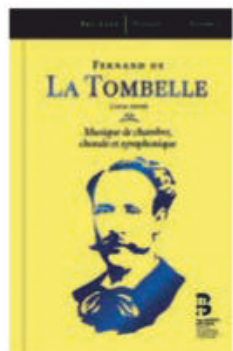
La Tombelle

'Portraits, Vol 5'

À la mère de l'enfant mort^a. Andante espressivo^b. Au fil de l'eau^c. Cello Sonata^b. Dans l'alcôve sombre^a. Fantaisie for Piano and Orchestra^d. Le furet^c. Le livre de la vie^a. Madrigal spirituel^c. Pages d'amour^a. Piano Quartet^e. Pie Jesu^c. Le secret des vagues^a. Suite for Three Cellos^f. Suites d'orchestre^g - No 1, Impressions matinales; No 2, Livre d'images. La voix de l'orgue^c

^aYann Beuron *ten*^f ^{Adrien Bellom}, ^{Emmanuelle Bertrand}, ^{Hermine Horiot}, ^{François Salque} *vcs*
^bPascal Amoyel, ^aJeff Cohen, ^dHannes Minnaar *pfs*
^cFrançois Saint-Yves *org*^g ^{I Giardini}; ^{Flemish Radio Choir}; ^{dg}Brussels Philharmonic Orchestra / ^{Hervé Niquet}

Bru Zane Ⓢ Ⓣ BZ1038 (3h 20' • DDD • T/t)



Fernand de La Tombelle (1854-1928), the subject of Palazzetto Bru Zane's latest composer portrait, was best known in his lifetime as a virtuoso organist and as co-founder, with Vincent d'Indy, of the Schola Cantorum in Paris, where he taught harmony from 1895. A titled aristocrat, he was a bit of a maverick and something of a polymath, a poet, folklorist and astronomer as well as a composer-performer, who divided his

time between Paris, where his formidable pianist mother (a pupil of Liszt) held her salon, and his chateau at Fayrac in the Dordogne (now a local tourist attraction), which he substantially rebuilt.

As a composer, he could be eclectic and variable. Tassis Christoyannis and Jeff Cohen's excellent disc of his mélodies (Aparté, 7/17) revealed both an unevenness of inspiration and a tendency on La Tombelle's part to wear his influences overtly on his sleeve, an impression reinforced, to some extent, by this greater cross section of his work. There are wonderful things. The 1887 *Fantaisie* for piano and orchestra, a virtuoso exercise in Franckian cyclic form with a deeply felt slow movement and dazzling finale, is a terrific piece that should by rights be better known, as should his 1895 Piano Quartet, again deploying cyclic form. He set great store by his own choral music, of which we have too few examples here, though they include the exquisite *Madrigal spirituel*, which weaves a poem by Gabriel Ducos around a cantus firmus 'Ave Maria', and the secular *Au fil de l'eau*, which quite remarkably depicts a river in full flood.

Elsewhere, however, La Tombelle's influences loom large and one notices some inequalities. *Impressions matinales*, the first of his two orchestral suites, opens with a sunrise modelled on 'Morning Mood' from Grieg's *Peer Gynt*, while its companion suite, *Livre d'images*, relies for its impact slightly too much on melodic repetition rather than thematic development. Though La Tombelle blew hot and cold about Wagner (he thought Massenet's *Le jongleur de Notre-Dame* a greater score than *Parsifal*), there's an overt debt to *Tristan* in the song-cycle *Pages d'amour* to his own rather flowery, erotic texts.

The performances, as we have come to expect from Bru Zane, are strong, though the tenor Yann Beuron, paired with Jeff Cohen for the songs, has a couple of uncharacteristic moments of strain in his upper registers. I Giardini do fine things with the Piano Quartet, there's plenty of drama in Emmanuelle Bertrand and Pascal Amoyel's performance of the intense 1902 Cello Sonata, and François Salque, Hermine Horiot and Adrien Bellom play with great lyrical refinement in the somewhat densely written Trio for three cellos from 1914. La Tombelle's choral writing is nothing if not exacting, and the Flemish Radio Choir sing with exemplary poise and dynamic control here for Hervé Niquet, who also conducts the orchestral and concertante works with the Brussels Philharmonic. You can't fault the

performances of the suites, where the strings and woodwind have a lovely sheen and the brass really gleam. The high point, though, is the *Fantaisie*, played with exhilarating drive and panache by Hannes Minnaar, and superbly conducted by Niquet, who generates tremendous excitement with it throughout. It's worth getting the set just for that. **Tim Ashley**

Mahler

Symphony No 4

Carolyn Sampson *sop*

Minnesota Orchestra / Osmo Vänskä

BIS Ⓢ Ⓣ BIS2356 (59' • DDD • T/t)



Let me say straight away that Vänskä is temperamentally far better suited to

the pristine, childlike world of the Fourth Symphony than he was to the epic Second (3/19). There are many aspects of this excellent performance (and recording) that remind me of George Szell's famous version with the Cleveland Orchestra – a crystalline quality, super-transparent and immaculately detailed, and mindful always of the work's classical precedents, not least Haydn with his wit and charm.

In short, this Fourth is fresh and bright-eyed, the first movement's pointedly 'Viennese' rubatos deftly turned but in such a way as never to impede the momentum, the eagerness and playfulness of it all. But there is weight, too, when at the vivid climax the trumpet sounds a chilling premonition of the fanfare which opens the Fifth Symphony. And there is 'theatre' in the hushed return of the first subject where, like Szell, Vänskä stretches the moment to create an extraordinary moment of stasis.

The second movement doesn't for me quite convey the parodistic sourness (Death, the fiddler) of Mahlerians such as Jurowski or the Fischers, Adám and Iván – but there is a glowing vision of earthly paradise in the portamento-wreathed Trio section that has an air of old-fashioned sentimentality about it.

Adám Fischer's recent account (AVI-Music, 1/18) alerted me to the benefits of not lingering over the opening paragraph of the slow movement but rather through-phrasing in ways more in keeping with the free spirit of what has gone before. Vänskä, like so many, is more self-consciously rapt and offers an account of the movement that is writ larger and more traditionally expansive and emotive. It is impressive, though, and I especially love the way in



Wonderful inevitability: Sir Mark Elder and the Hallé Orchestra continue their Sibelius cycle – see review on page 46

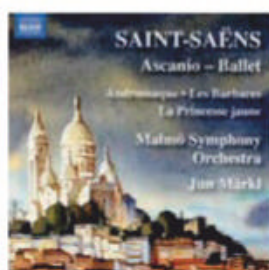
which the BIS engineers have captured those deep, unfathomable plunges of string basses.

Carolyn Sampson tenders some gorgeous singing in the finale's 'Das himmlische Leben'. It exudes maturity in its engagement and perceptive use of words and reminds us that there is nothing childish (or vocally childlike) about the highly ironic text (*pace* Bernstein on this one and his aberration of using a Vienna choirboy for his second recording). A photo in the booklet suggests that Sampson delivered her solo from an elevated podium by the trumpets. More theatre – heavenly indeed – though I do think Mahler would have approved of the increasingly familiar custom now to have the soprano enter through the orchestra during the final, seraphic pages of the slow movement. That's the floating image that I will always have in my mind's eye. **Edward Seckerson**

Saint-Saëns

Ascanio – Ballet, Act 3. Andromaque – Overture; Prelude, Act 4. Les barbares – Prologue. La jota aragonesa – Overture. Ouverture d'un opéra-comique inachevé. La princesse jaune – Overture

Malmö Symphony Orchestra / Jun Märkl
Naxos © 8 574033 (74' • DDD)



The main work in Jun Märkl and the Malmö Symphony's survey of Saint-Saëns rarities is the Act 3 ballet from the opera *Ascanio*, and excellent though it is, you can't help but feel that the disc has to some extent already been pipped to the post by Guillaume Tourniaire's recording of the complete score, made live in Geneva in 2017 and released by B Records a year later (12/18).

First performed in Paris in 1890, the opera loosely dramatises Benvenuto Cellini's 1540 sojourn at the court of François I of France, where he earned the enmity of the king's mistress the Duchesse d'Étampes. The ballet forms a grand mythological divertissement in the third act, where it is staged by the King to impress the Habsburg Emperor Charles V, who is vying with him to be Cellini's patron. It's a remarkably effective extract in its own right, and was seemingly admired as such in Saint-Saëns's lifetime. Reynaldo Hahn enthusiastically described it as 'a supreme triumph of taste and elegance – the entire Renaissance in a few pages', which is somewhat wide of the mark

as Rameau is very much the dominant influence in the Baroque pastiches that sit alongside passages reminiscent of Gounod or Delibes.

You can't fault Märkl's performance, either, which is grander in mood, slower in tempo and slightly weightier in sound than Tourniaire's Geneva forces in the complete work. There's some exemplary playing, above all from the woodwind in the tricky oboe solo in the 'Tambourin' that marks Bacchus's first appearance and the near concertante flute-writing that accompanies the scenes between Cupid and Psyche. Saint-Saëns provided alternative versions of the latter, which add considerably to the difficulty of the flute part, and which Märkl includes as an appendix: the excellent flautist should perhaps have been credited individually.

Its companion pieces are a sequence of shorter works that include the imposing if episodic orchestral Prologue to the 1901 opera *Les barbares*, and two substantial extracts from the incidental music Saint-Saëns provided for Sarah Bernhardt's 1902 production of Racine's *Andromaque*, sombre studies in chromaticism that suggest the conflicted, vacillating psychology of the play's characters. *Ouverture d'un opéra-comique inachevé*

is an early (1854) work of great charm, unperformed until 1913, when Saint-Saëns allowed Beecham to give the premiere. The Malmö Symphony, meanwhile, sound as if they're having fun with the japonaiserie of the Overture to *La princesse jaune* and play *La jota aragonesa* with great panache and spirit. It's all hugely enjoyable and well worth hearing, even if you already have *Ascanio* complete. **Tim Ashley**

Sibelius

Symphonies – No 4, Op 63; No 6, Op 104

Hallé Orchestra / Sir Mark Elder

Hallé © CDHLL7553 (70' • DDD)



This Sibelius Fourth reminded me of the reaction to the symphony's first

performance in April 1911 from the critic Bis, for whom the bleak landscape held less foreboding than magnificence, all superb uninterrupted views and glistening plays of light. It's not that Elder sugars the pill – though his strings don't shy from vibrato or touches of portamento – more that the conscious gesturing replaces the line drawing of legend with a full-on painting. The brass snarls of the first movement are dramatic, but such scenic work can actually draw impact from the various echo effects that speak for themselves when not drawn out (ditto the ending, which in the score slips remarkably away in a *mezzo-forte* and surely doesn't need preparing or underlining as it seems to be here). John Storgårds, with Manchester's other symphony orchestra, gets closer to what you could argue is the cold heart of the piece and the one big gesture – the peak of the third movement – has more power for rising up from his flatter, more subtle terrain. Storgårds's relative purity offers greater architectural clarity but his fifty shades of whiteness are actually more interesting than Elder's more obvious colouring.

While I have some reservations about Elder's interlocking of tempos in the Fourth (a more pronounced skip in the step of his finale would have been in keeping with what appears to have been the concept), his Sixth – like the charming Hallé Third issued back in 2009 (6/09) – flows with a wonderful inevitability, notwithstanding the tempo change at 8'39" in the first movement that threatens a return to gesture over line. Otherwise, this is a performance that combines weight with bounce, rhythmic sophistication with well-oiled movement and a cleanliness that

revels in the bigger picture. As in that Third, Elder has an eye and ear on the bottom of his orchestra, aware that it's the shape of the riverbed that controls the velocity of the water flowing over it. And in this symphony, mercifully, Elder lets the music disappear without announcement.

Andrew Mellor

Selected comparison:

BBC PO, Storgårds (6/14) (CHAN) CHAN10809

Tchaikovsky

Violin Concerto, Op 35^a. Eugene Onegin – Lensky's Aria (arr Auer/Rot)^c. None but the lonely heart (arr Elman)^b. Souvenir d'un lieu cher, Op 42 – No 1, Méditation (arr Glazunov)^c; No 3, Mélodie^b. Valse-Scherzo, Op 34 (arr Bezekirsky)^c. Valse sentimentale, Op 51 No 6 (arr Gitlis)^b

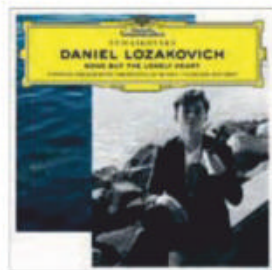
Daniel Lozakovich *vn*^b Stanislav Soloviev *pf*

^{ac} National Philharmonic Orchestra of Russia /

Vladimir Spivakov

DG © 483 6086GH (67' • DDD)

^aRecorded live at the International House of Music, Moscow, April 2019



Following Daniel Lozakovich's acclaimed DG debut (8/18), this

Tchaikovsky album brings his artistry into sharper focus. The Concerto was recorded live – presumably from a series of performances, as there is a small but audible edit at 2'30" in the first movement – and presents Lozakovich playing in the heat of the moment. Listen, for instance, to the passage at 6'12" in the same movement, where he seems less concerned with precision than about the shape of the gesture, or at 5'01" in the finale, where he's willing to smudge a few notes (not that he smudges very many) in his fervour to drive the phrases towards their goal. That said, I never get the sense he uses his technique to dazzle; rather, he always seems to keep lyricism to the fore.

Lozakovich plays the Canzonetta with the utmost tenderness, practically clinging to the melody for dear life. Yet if he's quite free with rubato, he's also careful to bind the phrases together so they retain a certain naturalness and nobility. There are a few passages where I feel his ardour makes him forget Tchaikovsky's instructions. He observes the *piano* marking at the initial appearance of the *Allegro moderato*'s second theme, for example – playing it with disarming confidentiality – but not at the melody's reappearance (at 14'35"), where he sings out at a full *forte*. I can't detect any

audience noise, although I'm pretty certain the crowd erupted at the work's end, for the final minutes are absolutely electrifying.

The six shorter pieces were recorded in the studio and present Lozakovich in craftsman mode – not that there's a hint of coolness or emotional reserve in any of them. In the booklet note, he tells the interviewer how he aimed in the transcription of Lensky's aria from *Eugene Onegin* to combine the tonal beauty of Wunderlich with the intensity of Kozlovsky – and he does exactly that. He finds drama, too, in the 'Méditation' (originally the slow movement of the Concerto), so it becomes a sister scene to the aria. What impresses me most, perhaps, is that his taste is as exquisite as his open-heartedness and technical finesse. He brings a light touch to salon bonbons like the 'Mélodie' and *Valse sentimentale*, and manages to find warmth even in the sparkling staccato and spiccato passages of the *Valse-Scherzo*.

Vladimir Spivakov elicits thrillingly articulate playing from the Moscow-based orchestra in the Concerto and provides aptly atmospheric support in the miniatures. I found the shift to piano accompaniment for three numbers slightly jarring at first, although they're sensitively played by Stanislav Soloviev. Indeed, the entire album is hugely enjoyable and offers ample proof that the violinist, still in his teens, is no mere flash in the pan.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Vivaldi

'Concerti per violino, Vol 7: "Per il castello"

Violin Concertos – RV257; RV273;

RV367; RV371; RV289; RV390

Alessandro Tampieri *vn*

Accademia Bizantina / Ottavio Dantone

Naïve © OP7078 (75' • DDD)



If Ottavio Dantone and his Accademia Bizantina aren't already ringing bells

of recognition in your heads for the many fine contributions they have already made to date for The Vivaldi Edition on Naïve, then perhaps you'll remember them as having been the crack ensemble behind Delphine Galou on her *Gramophone* Award-winning recital disc of Baroque operatic rarities, 'Agitata' (Alpha, 1/18). Still, even if this latest Vivaldi offering is genuinely your first encounter with them, it's going to be a good one.

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University Library of Turin, The Vivaldi Edition hasn't just ended up being a conduit to exploring areas of Vivaldi's output which had hitherto never seen the light of modern day. It's also produced album after album of fizzing performances whose musical value stretches far beyond scholarly value. This latest addition, for which Dantone and his ensemble are joined by the violinist Alessandro Tampieri, is no exception to that rule: six violin concertos that are likely to have formed part of a 15-concerto-shaped financial lifeline thrown to Vivaldi by the Moravia-based Venetian nobleman Count Vinciguerra Tommaso Collalto during the ill-fated final trip to Vienna which saw the composer die in penury having arrived to find all the opera theatres closed on account on the death of Emperor Charles VI. These are late works representing a violinist's treasure trove with their virtuoso inventiveness, huge range of articulation and phrasing, and frequently light and lucid *galant* textures.

It's all been beautifully brought off here, too. From Tampieri himself, there's a slender suppleness that makes for a lovely feel of rhapsodic freedom, yet without ever messing with the solidity of Vivaldi's trademark rhythmic certainty. He also teases out every ounce of the works' lyricism, whether in the virtuoso passagework or the aria-like extended melodic lines found in the slow movements. Accademia Bizantina, meanwhile, are finely nuanced, nimbly and tightly together, and revel gently in the music's delicacy. Their continuo is especially magical – for instance, the way Dantone daintily fans out his final flourish at the end of RV371 in B flat's first movement, or the deliciousness with which the archlute occasionally rises above the texture in the same concerto's final *Allegro* and that of RV273 in E minor.

Another Vivaldi Edition cracker, and a subtly dainty one at that.

Charlotte Gardner

Winbeck

'The Complete Symphonies'

Symphonies – No 1, 'Tu solus'^a; No 2^b;

No 3, 'Grodek'^c; No 4, 'De profundis'^d;

No 5, 'Jetzt und in der Stunde des Todes'^e

^{cd}Christel Borchers *contr* ^dWerner Buchin

counterten ^dGünter Binge *bar* ^aBruce Weinberger

tsax ^dWolf Euba, ^cUdo Samel *spkrs* ^dKonzertchor

Darmstadt; ^aBavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra

/ Muhai Tang; ^dBeethoven Orchester Bonn;

^bORF Radio Symphony Orchestra, Vienna;

^{ce}Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin /

^cMathias Husmann, ^{bde}Dennis Russell Davies

TYXart © ⑤ TXA17091 (4h 52' • DDD)

Recorded live at the ^aHerkulesaal, Munich, April 1985; ^cStudio 1, Radio Free Berlin, August 1991;

^dAlte Oper, Frankfurt, September 1993; ^bGoldener Saal, Musikverein, Vienna, October 2001; ^eHaus des Rundfunks, Berlin, January 2017



That Heinz Winbeck (1946–2019) was relatively unknown outside his native

Germany only confirms the lack of recognition accorded Austro-German symphonism in the post-war era, to which this set of his symphonies makes handsome while regrettably posthumous amends.

Such quirkily subversive pieces as *Entgegengesang* (1973) or *Lenau-Fantasien* (1979) gave little inkling Winbeck might embrace this most historically loaded of genres, yet he did just that with his First Symphony (1983). Inspired by the fate of Sophie Scholl, along with that of the White Rose resistance in the Second World War, its Mahlerian (in impact if not in length) confrontation between unmediated violence and rapt eloquence was subsequently resolved in revision with a return to the opening music and followed by a conclusion of numbing finality.

Muhai Tang presides over a reading of this piece that is more propulsive than the admirable Wergo account and with far better sound. Dennis Russell Davies takes over for the Second Symphony (1987) – emotionally more equivocal in its trajectory from ominous expectancy, via mounting agitation, to a searching introspection itself denied by the percussive fusillade at the end. If this piece centres (aesthetically rather than stylistically) on the Romanticism of Schumann, the Third Symphony (1988) looks to Berg in its fractured expression articulated through poetry by Georg Trakl; cannily, his final poem (the work's subtitle) is never set but instead recited toward the work's climax, prior to a closing fantasia of fraught irresolution. A culmination in all respects, the Fourth Symphony (1993) sets further Trakl alongside Psalm 130 for an 80-minute work that ranges as though a Bosch-like fresco over Germanic culture in time of crisis, its seven continuous sections given symphonic cohesion by an underlying symmetry that tempers rhetorical overkill and makes possible the intriguingly oblique close.

After four such works in just over a decade, some 15 years passed before the

Fifth Symphony (2009). Believing himself unable to complete the finale of Bruckner's Ninth, Winbeck chose instead to embody themes from this torso within a piece of comparable scale and intensity. Its three movements unfold as a cumulative sequence towards a lengthy coda where Bruckner's chorale hovers, vision-like, before fading into silence; in the process suggesting a 'third way', between the atrophied poles of modernism and minimalism, that Western music could pursue.

No texts or translations, but Thorsten Preuss contributes an extensive overview of each piece, with artwork by Winbeck's friend Engelbert Hilbich adorning each disc. Quite a coup for the innovative TYXart label, and a mandatory purchase for open-minded listeners everywhere.

Richard Whitehouse

Symphony No 1 – comparative version:

Saarbrücken RSO, DR Davies (WERG) WER6509-2

'Boston Symphony Commissions'

Andres Everything Happens So Much Nathan

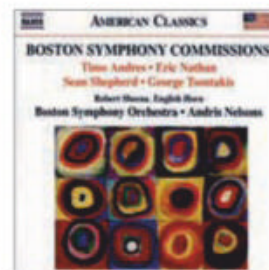
the space of a door Shepherd Express

Abstractionism Tsontakis Sonnets^a

^aRobert Sheena *cor ang*

Boston Symphony Orchestra / Andris Nelsons

Naxos American Classics © 8 559874 (62' • DDD)



By no means synonymous with new music, Andris Nelsons has yet

maintained the Boston Symphony's illustrious track record for commissions since becoming its music director, as these premieres from 2016/17 demonstrate. Two of the works make ideal curtain-raisers – Erik Nathan's *the space of a door* with its cumulative eliding between explosive *tuttis* and stealthy ensemble passages, and Timo Andres's *Everything Happens So Much*, which is the nearest of these pieces to evoking those minimalist traits still prevalent in American music.

The other works are both multi-movement entities. *Sonnets* finds George Tsontakis drawing on Shakespeare for a concertante piece featuring cor anglais, its essentially ruminative nature to the fore in the subdued eloquence of the outer movements, but exuding sustained intensity then incisive nonchalance in the central brace of a cohesive sequence, rendered by Robert Sheena with laudable authority. Four artists are the starting point for Sean Shepherd's *Express*



Expressivity and virtuosity: the Iceland Symphony Orchestra, under conductor Daniel Bjarnason, are captured in superb sound in their concert hall in Reykjavik

Abstractionism, their combative and decidedly exploratory approach each paralleled in music that recalls Gunther Schuller's *Klee Studies* in its freewheeling textural contrasts and recondite humour. If any ongoing continuity towards an integrated whole remains elusive, this is hardly the fault of Nelsons or his Boston players, whose execution is beyond reproach.

The sound exemplifies Symphony Hall's renowned definition and immediacy, with succinctly informative notes by Robert Kirzinger. Interesting that relatively little of this music moves at a fast tempo – evidently not only the heyday of modernism was found wanting in this respect.

Richard Whitehouse

'Concurrence'

Pálsson Quake^a Sigfúsdóttir Oceans

Thorvaldsdóttir Metacosmos

Tómasson Piano Concerto No 2^b

^aSæunn Thorsteinsdóttir *vc* ^bVíkingur Ólafsson *pf*

Iceland Symphony Orchestra / Daniel Bjarnason

Sono Luminus (CD +  DSL92237 (55' • DDD • DTS-HD MA5.1, 9.1 Auro 3D & 11.1 Dolby Atmos)



Three of the works on this superbly performed and recorded CD are purely orchestral and could be described as tone poems (to use that deeply outmoded term). Anna Thorvaldsdóttir has featured before on some Sono Luminus releases – and those of other labels – and is undeniably one of the most exciting composers of the younger generation. *Metacosmos*, like most of her pieces, is a challenging listen but has a clear structure. After a dramatically atmospheric opening, the music slowly builds towards its volatile central climax – which put me in mind, a little, of Marie Samuelsson's *Air Drum III* – before dissipating into the ether. Even more gripping, however, is *Oceans* by the composer-violinist Maria Huld Markan Sigfúsdóttir. I have remarked on the fluency of her writing before in these pages but this orchestral fantasy takes this to a higher level. Her music is enormously

compelling in its swell and fall – almost a modern *Oceanides* that seems to look as much inwardly as across the waters. There are no sudden squalls or tempests, unlike in Páll Ragnar Pálsson's *Quake*. This is the most obviously experimental in ethos, a quarter-hour long concert piece for cello (virtuosically performed by Sæunn Thorsteinsdóttir) that again seems to chart some broken inner landscape.

Haukur Tómasson's beguiling Second Piano Concerto is the most outward-looking in some respects, a display piece that puts Víkingur Ólafsson on his mettle in a 17-minute single movement made up of several distinct, inter-related sections which move between light and shade throughout. The star performers, however, are the Iceland Symphony Orchestra, well directed by Daniel Bjarnason, whose understanding of the various styles, the underlying expressivity and sheer virtuosity of interpretation are wholly involving. Sono Luminus's sound is first-rate, capturing the full range of this marvellous band in their wonderful concert hall, Harpa. **Guy Rickards**

Dvořák's Symphony No 9

Gianandrea Nosedà meets Richard Bratby to enthuse about approaching the *New World* afresh



Gianandrea Nosedà conducting America's National Symphony Orchestra, of which he is Music Director and with which he has recorded Dvořák's Ninth for the first time

A 21st-century conductor's job is rarely just about conducting. I'm due to talk to Gianandrea Nosedà about the debut own-label recording by the orchestra of which he has been Music Director since 2017, Washington DC's National Symphony Orchestra (NSO). But today Nosedà is at the Barbican in London in his capacity as Principal Guest Conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra, and they're about to film him for social media. He's a busy man; but if he's had to make a mental gear change to talk about Dvořák's Symphony No 9 (*From the New World*), he's so animated that it doesn't show. The NSO's first disc on its own label pairs Copland's *Billy the Kid* with the *New World* Symphony – a statement of intent from America's national orchestra?

'It's pretty clear, yes!' he agrees. 'What I think personally is that Dvořák was, of course, in contact with a different musical heritage, because this was a new country. And, of course, Dvořák as a composer is very much in the same framework as Brahms. His craftsmanship is pretty solid. So how was he to use these new elements and create a symphony that is a perfect combination of European craftsmanship, sonata form, and American elements of inspiration?' With that, we're into the score, at bar 1.

'I think the purpose of the introduction is to create tension for the opening of the curtain. Dvořák was a good operatic composer, so he rarely failed to create suspense and expectation. Also, this opening rhythm in the cellos – probably, if he had not been in America, the first bar of the cello would have been ...' He hums a straightened-out version of the cellos' opening phrase. 'The syncopation

is really something. But why didn't he also do that with the viola line? The problem is how to combine these two different cultural experiences. Then the horns give this signal in bar 4, like a fanfare, just to get attention. And also, at bar 16, there is already an anticipation of the main theme in the French horns – and this element of the syncopation becomes very, very important.' He hums again. 'The syncopated rhythm is just moving the music forwards.'

We're barely at the first *Allegro molto*, and already Nosedà has analysed and decoded both the symphony's thematic DNA and the cultural tensions that underlie it. He evidently knows his Dvořák – and yet he's barely recorded any. He was trained in Milan and was formerly Principal Guest Conductor of the Mariinsky Theatre in St Petersburg, and his discography to date is centred on the 40-odd recordings he made while Chief Conductor of the BBC Philharmonic in Manchester, in repertoire that ranges from Beethoven to Dallapiccola. It turns out that discographies can be deceptive.

'This will be my first official recording of a Dvořák symphony. I recorded the Eighth, but only for *BBC Music* magazine, and I am also a big lover of Nos 5 and 7. I've conducted *Rusalka*, and I've done the last four tone poems.' Still, for an orchestra like the NSO, the *New World* can hardly have come as much of a surprise. Surely the challenge was how to approach it afresh? He nods in agreement.

'The risk with very familiar repertoire is taking everything for granted. You need to draw the players' attention, again, to the written side of things: "that is *fortepiano*", "that is *sforzando*"; "that is an accent", "this is another kind of accent".

The job is not to convince them that you're right, but to invite them to read carefully the text, the music. This recording was a fantastic experience, because they were challenged to go back, to reread everything. You know, all the articulation.' He dives back into the score a few bars before fig 11 in the first movement. 'For instance look at this combination of articulation and tenuto, building until the peroration, and then this line from the cello.' He points to the soaring cello line that starts at bar 346. 'This is completely original. It's fantastic. It's coming from nowhere, but it's beautiful! And then back again to the minor.'


I suggest that the symphony's extraordinary palette of instrumental colours emerges particularly strongly from his new recording, and he takes the opportunity to explain the NSO's stylistic heritage from Rostropovich's 17-year stint as Music Director (from 1977) up to his own tenure.

'You can spend two hours explaining a rubato; then you invite a singer, and the orchestra immediately understand it'

'Of course, Rostropovich brought a typically Russian way of producing sound: dark, deep and centred; articulated, but not incredibly rhythmical. After him came Leonard Slatkin – really focused on the vertical. Perfect intonation, which is fantastic. Then Christoph Eschenbach, a great pianist, a great conductor, bringing with him this middle-European culture of sound. With him, the players learnt how to phrase.'

And himself? His work in the opera house is the key. 'You can spend two hours explaining a rubato; then you invite a singer, and the orchestra immediately understand what it is about. The vocal element is important, so that is what I try to bring – the freedom of phrasing in a vocal way. Also I bring the efficiency of rehearsal that I learnt in Manchester, and my Italianate spirit.'

So we look at that famous singing melody played by the cor anglais at the start of the *New World* Symphony's *Largo* second movement. 'Of course, I gave the player freedom to express. She's an artist. But at first she was playing it a bit like recitative in an opera. I told her, "Yes! I like that. But do you remember what Beethoven wrote in the *Recitativo* with basses and cellos in the finale of the Ninth Symphony? "In the character of a recitative, but in tempo" – it's incredible, because you have this kind of narrative element, but you don't lose the pulse. I think that is magic – the simplicity.'

We push on into the heart of the *Largo*: the walking pizzicato bass that starts at bar 54, and the *Poco più mosso* at bar 64: 'This is fantastic. He's trying, in a strict structure, to create mobility, flexibility.' For an artist of Nosedá's experience, in a work as familiar (and perhaps as undervalued) as this, his engagement with the notes is striking. This is a conductor who clearly has no trouble getting up in the morning – and who, for all his attention to detail, has never lost his instinctive emotional response to the music. As we reach the *pianissimo* passage at bar 78, his face lights up and he breaks into song once more. 'It's like a ritual. These tremolandos are clearly shivers. It's the world of the spirits. Oh my God, it's very emotional. It's just goosebumps. Goosebumps.' 

► To read our review of Nosedá's recording of Dvořák's Ninth turn to page 37



NEW RELEASES



CLAIRIÈRES
Songs by Lili and Nadia Boulanger
Nicholas Phan tenor • Myra Huang piano

Grammy Award-nominated tenor **Nicholas Phan** and pianist **Myra Huang** pay homage to two exceptional composers of the 20th century who have often been overlooked in favour of their male counterparts – Lili and Nadia Boulanger. Nadia, known primarily for her tutelage of such great composers as Aaron Copland, Philip Glass and Astor Piazzolla, was a highly respected composer during the *Belle époque*. Her younger sister Lili was the first female Grand Prize winner of the *Prix du Rome*; her compositional legacy was cut short by her death at the age of 24. At the heart of this release is Lili's 13-part song cycle *Clairières dans le ciel*. Alongside are a selection of songs set to poetry by the sisters' contemporaries Paul Verlaine, Maurice Maeterlinck, Francis Jammes and Albert Samain.



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Chamber



Andrew Mellor hears the distinctive music of Lars Petter Hagen:

'Norwegian composers have long played with their country's obsession with tradition but few do so with such style and humour' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 55**



Richard Bratby hails the Dante Quartet's Stanford:

'The more you listen to this music, the more distinctively Stanford's own voice emerges' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 58**

JS Bach

'The Well-Tempered Consort, Vol 1'

An Wasserflüssen Babylon, BWV653b. Aus tiefer Not, BWV686. Fugues – BWV547; BWV552; BWV854; BWV859; BWV886. Kyrie, Gott heiliger Geist, BWV671. Musikalisches Opfer, BWV1079 – Ricercar a 3; Ricercar a 6. Preludes and Fugues – BWV846; BWV867; BWV869; BWV891. Sinfonia No 9, BWV795. Vater unser im Himmelreich, BWV737

Phantasm

Linn © CKD618 (67' • DDD)



This wonderful disc transports the counterpoint of Johann Sebastian

Bach from the solitary universe of the keyboardist's fingertips – and occasionally feet – to the convivial conversation of the 16th-century English home. Drawing chiefly on the two books of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, the *Musical Offering* and the *Clavier-Übung III*, the viol consort Phantasm breathe into well-known Bach a breath of newborn liveliness.

It is now, thankfully, a well-eroded cliché that a Bach fugue is a cerebral, neutral exercise. Yet these performances by Phantasm find conversation, play and dance in the unlikelyst of contrapuntal moments. What, essentially, is most fantastic about this disc is that we are listening to six players – Phantasm are joined by the spectacular bass viol sonority of guest Liam Byrne for the works in six voices – each with their own body and instrument, and therefore unique timbre and artistry, playing music that is usually only played by a single person. As such, there are a few more hand-waving, flag-waving entries that burst through the texture in shimmering *inégalement* than we are used to in traditional recordings of 'solo Bach'. It's thrilling. Phantasm unfailingly occupy a sweet spot of individual voices in psychic attunement. In other words, Bach's imitative forms are infused with the

inimitability of human nature as well as the equally human endeavour to be one. We hear both generous, marital blend as well as the fragile variation and asymmetry of human interaction.

Indeed, joy emerges in the moments when things are 'not so perfect'. Rather than the contrapuntal texture being controlled by the eight fingers and two thumbs of an omniscient single brain, there is gloriousness in the smudging of decisions, the flash of neurons to alter one's course according to the musical persuasion of others. Phantasm present us with the realness of human existence: we hear opinion, persuasion, sometimes provocation. A submediant chord (apologies to those whose music theory is increasingly hazy), for instance, manifests not as a unified structural decision but rather as one individual's chosen moment to provoke others. The boundless dynamism of the C major Fugue from BWV547 is one highlight among many. The music accumulates in energy and builds in tension until what can only be described as the most sensational squeeze, which then explodes in sparks and ribbons of diatonicism.

The conversational textures, however, aren't always so successful. The Prelude No 22 from BWV891 becomes somewhat cluttered and frantic (particularly after the profound depth of the *Aus tiefer Not* arrangement). Indeed, the album is indebted to these tracks of slower-moving organ music. The arrangement of *Vater unser im Himmelreich*, BWV737, is sumptuous: music that you can swim in, textures that coax the eardrums like the thick black water of the North Sea. I look forward to 'The Well-Tempered Consort, Vol 2'.

Mark Seow

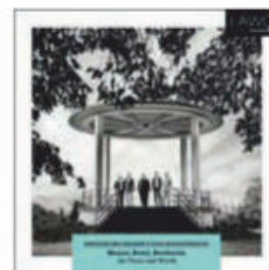
Beethoven • Danzi • Mozart

Beethoven Quintet for Piano and Winds, Op 16

Danzi Quintet for Piano and Winds, Op 41

Mozart Quintet for Piano and Winds, K452

Christian Ihle Hadland *pf* **Oslo Chamber Academy**
LAWO © LWC1187 (76' • DDD)



Mozart proclaimed the wind-and-piano quintet of 1784 his favourite among all

his works, and the young Beethoven clearly modelled his own quintet on the Salzburger's 12 years later. The two works are paired on disc almost as standard. Franz Danzi (1763-1826), equidistant in age between the two, provides a third voice, reared among the woodwind-rich sonorities of the court at Mannheim and Munich.

The Oslo Kammerakademi, founded by oboist David Friedemann Strunck, are a known quantity in Mozart, having already recorded a pair of Viennese serenades and a wind arrangement of numbers from *La clemenza di Tito* (3/18). Christian Ihle Hadland is also at home here, as witness a concerto pairing admired in these pages by Richard Wigmore (Simax, 4/13). Hadland is ever attentive to his partners, playing the all-seeing Don Alfonso to the eliding conversations of the wind instruments. In the Beethoven the pianist takes on a more forceful character, often operating more as a concertante voice in opposition to the winds. Danzi's Quintet steps away from refined E flat major to darker D minor and reveals its composer's dramatic proclivities alongside his individual skills in woodwind-writing.

The Kammerakademi are all soloists or orchestral principals and field modern instruments with the exception of Steinar Granmo Nilsen's natural horn. This unwieldy creature is the real revelation of the recording: its ability to chide and console in equal measure adds a piquant edge to the corporate ensemble sound. Among some beautifully turned phrasing, its disruptive qualities add to the pleasure of this finely played disc. **David Threasher**

Beethoven

'Complete Piano Trios, Vol 4'

Piano Trios – No 7, 'Archduke', Op 97; WoO38; WoO39. Variations on 'Ich bin der Schneider Kakadu', Op 121a



Rich in insight: the Van Baerle Trio conclude their survey of Beethoven's piano trios with the final summit of the 'Archduke'

Van Baerle Trio

Challenge Classics (F) CC72782
(79' • DDD/DSD)



One of the most engaging qualities of the Van Baerle Trio's Beethoven cycle has

been its feeling of intimacy – of three players, each with an attractive sound, playing together with a sense of something understood. There's been ample scope for joy, and for surprises too. But overall, these have been chamber music performances in the best sense: modest in proportion but rich in insight, with a special lightness and clarity conferred in part by pianist Hannes Minnaar's decision to play on a Chris Maene straight-strung concert grand.

So after a rewarding journey through the smaller peaks and vales, they now reach the final summit of the *Archduke*, and I'm pleased to say that they haven't let the altitude go to their heads. They begin as they mean to go on: lyrically, lucidly, with Minnaar's left hand adding just an aura of romanticism to a performance whose strength – for all the ringing brightness that the Van Baerles bring to Beethoven's cascading climaxes – is in its quietness and intelligence. They practically melt into the

first movement's recapitulation, and the great *Andante* is inward without losing its sense of flow. The Scherzo is crisp and fleet-footed, with a winning playfulness about the piano's sudden *grande valse*.

In other words, this isn't an *Archduke* in the epic manner. But if, like me, you've enjoyed the journey so far, you'll find this performance thoroughly persuasive on its own poetic terms. That also goes for the musical mopping-up exercise that concludes the disc: the two early, unpublished trios and the *Kakadu* Variations, all played with affection and an unaffected, bright-eyed swing that kept reminding me of the composer this group must surely tackle next: Schubert.

Richard Bratby

Beethoven

'Late String Quartets'

String Quartets – No 11, 'Serioso', Op 95; No 12, Op 127; No 13, Op 130; No 14, Op 131; No 15, Op 132; No 16, Op 135. Grosse Fuge, Op 133

Brodsky Quartet

Chandos (M) (3) CHAN20114 (3h 50' • DDD)



At every turn of these engrossing and deeply considered readings, I like how the

Brodskys ask questions of the music, of the listener too. Taking considerably more time over Op 95's second-movement *Allegretto* – very much *ma non troppo here* – than modern ensembles with an established Beethoven pedigree – 7'59" compared to the Takács' 6'59" and the Hagens' 6'12" – yields nothing that resembles a slow movement racked by pathos nor yet a fractured assemblage of gestures, but rather a 'structured disruption' (to borrow a phrase from Daniel Chua's analysis of the late quartets) of the composer's *Allegretto* style raised to sublime heights and then cut back down to size in the second movements of the Seventh and Eighth symphonies.

Marginal and telling but never stagy pauses achieve this, and so does a full tonal body admitting any amount of variation, from the consecrating vibrato of Jacqueline Thomas's opening cello descent to the uncanny pure tone of Paul Cassidy's viola D that quietly observes how far we've travelled from the advertised F minor. In the broken fugato of the movement's B section, in the tension of the finale's introduction and the frantically scurrying semiquavers of its coda I hear the kind of contingent drama that you could imagine experiencing in concert, if you were lucky, while for all their many virtues, the Takács' Decca recordings pass under a shadow of studied neutrality.



PETER KOFLER

OPUS BACH ORGAN WORKS



Gramophone Editor's Choice January 2020

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Transitions are a continual pleasure of this set, always driven by something more than tempo markings, like the gathering of forces in the momentum from Scherzo to Trio of Op 127, after the movement had begun with disconcerting charm, with the main motif flying off the Brodsky's bows like sparrows from a branch. Such care over transitions lends rare cogency to the suite-like construction of Op 131, gathered around a central *Andante* which, again, opens with a Biedermeier gentility that survives its many interruptions mostly unscathed, the more effectively to be brushed aside by the unseemly – perfectly judged – haste of the succeeding *Presto*.

So the Brodskys's playing faithfully follows Beethoven into extreme terrain, not least in a radiant 20-minute account of the 'Heiliger Dankgesang', anchoring an account of Op 132 that opens at the outer limit of audibility – I find the Chandos engineering, the differentiation of voices and technical finesse of the recording a pleasure in itself – and closes in a spirit of defiance more satisfyingly provisional than the edgier, more stressful triumph achieved by younger ensembles such as the Elias and Belcea quartets. The sense of the music unfolding in the here and now, of delight enjoyed and suffering borne unironised by hindsight, is especially well caught in an Op 135 even fuller than the Hagens – my modern benchmark hitherto – of quizzical humour.

To my ears, the 'Danza tedesca' is a rare example of mannerism in these recordings, within a disc of Op 130 and the *Grosse Fuge* that does not quite share the definite purpose or the technical finesse of its companions. Considered overall, however, it's a set to reckon with, distinctive above specific concerns of tempo, timbre and dynamic for the articulation of answers as well as questions in music that demands listeners as well as players go back to first principles every time. **Peter Quantrill**

Braga Santos

'Complete Chamber Music, Vol 1'

String Quartets – No 1, Op 4; No 2, Op 29.

String Sextet, Op 65^a

Lopes-Graça Quartet with

^aLeonora Braga Santos va ^aIrene Lima vc

Toccata Classics © TOCC0207 (79' • DDD)



Joly Braga Santos (1924-88) was one of the most important Portuguese composers of the 20th century and it is excellent that this fine recording, with international

distribution, has appeared. The three works included cover a wide chronological range: the String Quartet No 1 is from 1945, No 2 from 1957 and the Sextet from 1986. All three have been previously recorded, but on discs that were only ever properly available in Portugal and are now long out of print.

Braga Santos's early work is often compared to music by Vaughan Williams and Walton, and it would be idle to deny the resemblance; it employs modality and demonstrates a notable gift for counterpoint. Indeed, Vaughan Williams is certain to come to mind on beginning to listen to the first and third movements in particular of the Quartet No 1, but there is also a Bartókian grit that becomes more evident as the work progresses and is especially evident in the fiery fourth movement, *Allegro molto energico ed appassionato*. The work's overall duration is just over 36 minutes, and for a 21-year-old composer it is a major statement indeed.

The Quartet No 2 is still more reminiscent of Bartók (though one would never actually mistake the Portuguese for the Hungarian – Braga Santos's very personal kind of lyricism alone would ensure that), and it is cyclical in structure. It is also much more contained than the First Quartet, lasting just over 20 minutes. For me, the cherry on the cake is the Sextet, in which the composer's modal lyricism has been enriched by new harmonic thinking and employment of chromaticism: this was a process that began in the 1960s, and this is certainly one of his most impressive works in his renewed style. It is a haunting, brooding work, making full use of the rich sound world of the string sextet. All three works are superbly performed, with energy and true passion. The booklet includes a biographical note by the composer's eldest daughter, Piedade Braga Santos, and an excellent analytical essay by Bernardo Mariano. I look forward to future volumes with keen anticipation.

Ivan Moody

Dvořák

String Quartets – No 8, Op 80 B57;

No 10, Op 51 B92

Albion Quartet

Signum © SIGCD597 (57' • DDD)



What a gorgeous disc! True, it'd be a poor sort of string quartet who couldn't make your heart melt with the opening phrases of Dvořák's Op 51 String Quartet. But I've

rarely felt such a glow of love from the less familiar E major Quartet, Op 80, the opening piece on this second disc in (let's hope) a series devoted to Dvořák from this young British ensemble.

I'm not sure if there's such a thing as a distinctively Czech style of quartet-playing (when I interviewed the Pavel Haas Quartet last year, they emphatically denied it – 11/19). But anyone who thinks that the new generation of super-quartets are merely about virtuoso brilliance should hear the myriad shades of russet and gold that the Albion Quartet find in these two enchanting works. This, surely, is how Dvořák's chamber music is supposed to sound: luminous, playful (there's a real kick to his dotted dance-rhythms), and simultaneously generous and touchingly intimate.

But the Albions engage head as well as heart, finding exactly the right scale for the climaxes in Op 80's slow movement and moving brilliantly, buoyantly as one in the exuberant *skočná* that closes Op 51. Some tempos can feel a little breathless but the Albions' obvious love for this music is never laboured: I liked the way leader Tamsin Waley-Cohen applies the lightest of portamentos to the third movement of Op 80 – nothing blatant, but enough to make the melody flow.

But in the big *tutti*s (such as in the fast sections of Op 51's *dumka* second movement) there's still a satisfying crunch of rosin on string, though it's never hectoring or crude – just (like the whole disc) sweetly and unaffectedly musical. I know it's early, but I can already see this being my pick of the year. **Richard Bratby**

Hagen

Funeral March for Edvard Grieg. Harmonium

Repertoire. Max F: Passage – Silence and

Light Triptych. Paulines Piano – I; II.

Three Transfigurations

Cikada / Christian Eggen

LAWO © LWC1190 (48' • DDD)



Svetlana Boym described nostalgia as 'a romance with one's own fantasy' –

pertinent words in the case of Norway, a country that modernised before it had a chance to mature. Norwegian composers have long played with their country's obsession with identity and tradition but few do so with the combination of style, beauty, humour and sincerity of Lars Petter Hagen. Even when teasing the whole predicament of Norway's

phantom burdens of history (short) and tradition (often constructed), he manages to tell you how important those things are to him, to Norwegians, to all of us.

Much of the music here constitutes a romance with a fantasy. All of it refracts music of the past: Nordraak's *Funeral March for Edvard Grieg*, Pauline Hall's folk-song arrangements and music by Strauss, Mahler, Berg, Bruckner and Schoenberg. The 'harmonium repertoire' of the title track consists of harmonium parts from orchestral scores by the latter five sprung from their original contexts, filtered as if through faltering memory. The strings accompanying an Indian harmonium (made in Southall, London) yearn to tell of what's missing – to fill in gaps or sing a full phrase – but are stopped short. Grand yet teasingly quiet chords at the end of the second movement suggest a big resolution, a transcendence, happening somewhere out of vision. The dark, reedy tones of the fourth movement eventually give way to a sampled funeral march to create distance (an old trick Grieg used to pull using more analogue techniques). Everywhere, stalking darkness prevents the music from ever getting too comfy.

Three Transfigurations consists of fantasy recollections of Richard Strauss (a composer who had real reasons to lament lost traditions) – controlled, eloquent miniatures for strings and harmonium rooted in simple but resonant diatonic harmonies. *Funeral March for Edvard Grieg* replaces the inflated grandeur of Nordraak's original with something entirely different and not devoid of optimism. Microtonal techniques and a garland of fluorescent electronic colours pull it into the 'now', just as, strangely, Pauline Hall's tonally drifting piano, now in Hagen's possession and tenderly played here by Kenneth arlsson, does her own folk-song arrangements.

Before he was fully at ease with his own gentle, smiling provocation, Hagen had his work *Passage* (2000) performed under a pseudonym. The work was inspired by Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin but written in Edvard Munch's seaside house at Warnemünde, where the composer responded strongly to being alone in an isolated, summer seaside resort in the depths of winter. Accordingly, *Passage* is an emotionally intense piece concerned with memory but also with the space and light of architecture and the sharply cut scars and gashes of Libeskind's building (and something of its zig-zag form). All is straight and angled, but for curving cello glissandos; we're in a hesitant,

contemplative world until the final movement's bid for escape. Tenderly performed, it's a handsome way of using the past to overcome the present.

Andrew Mellor

Litolff

Piano Trios – No 1, Op 47; No 2, Op 56.
Serenade, Op 91^a

Leonore Piano Trio (^aBenjamin Nabarro *vn*
Gemma Rosefield *vc* ^aTim Horton *pf*)
Hyperion © CDA68305 (70' • DDD)



Henry Litolff was, in spite of his European-sounding surname, born in Marylebone.

He is remembered for *that* Scherzo, yet how ill-served he is by such a legacy. Hyperion has done sterling service with its recordings of his four extant *Concertos symphoniques* and now it presents the first two piano trios and the violin Serenade, all from around 1850, of which only the First Trio has previously been recorded.

The Leonore Trio have made something of a habit of exploring the byways of the trio repertoire but none is more worthwhile than this disc. You might anticipate that the keyboard would tend to dominate, given that Litolff was such a prodigious pianist, but that is absolutely not the case (though he makes huge technical demands ranging from powerful double-octave writing to the most dextrous of ornamentation). It is the cello that opens the First Trio in D minor, in quietly questioning mode before the driving energy of the movement proper. Litolff is clearly a master of form, using devices such as silence and reharmonisation to potent effect, while the main theme is reduced to just a fragment at the movement's close. There are many highlights in this work, not least the concertante-like interplay between piano and strings in the easeful *Andante*, launched by a warm chorale in the piano, with the keyboard-writing getting ever more elaborate; or the Scherzo, which combines a Mendelssohnian élan with an iron-like strength – no wonder Liszt was so impressed by Litolff's music. The finale sets off with a purposeful sense of the dance, the strings initially underlining the rhythm though later the violin has wonderfully airborne lines. Throughout the Leonore combine finesse with a palpable sense of enjoyment that is entirely engaging.

The Second Trio is on the whole a more laid-back affair. There's the kind

of generosity of spirit that we later find in Dvořák's great chamber works, yet this doesn't in any way pale in comparison. There's much to delight in the first movement, which ranges from sheer charm to a surprising intensity in the development, which is again swept away by an upbeat ending. The second-movement Scherzo takes the form of a dance, introduced by violin, with the three players joshing with each other, the pizzicato and *sul ponticello* writing adding colour and zest. From here we move via a strikingly touching slow movement to a finale of lightning-quick energy, demanding the quickest of reflexes, an ear for accentuation and tremendous dexterity, all of which the Leonore deliver in spades. Add to this the simple charm of the Serenade, beguilingly played by Benjamin Nabarro, and a typically informative note by Jeremy Nicholas, and you have a winner. **Harriet Smith**

► See the Q&A with the Leonore Piano Trio on page 59

Mozart

'Sonatas for Fortepiano and Violin, Vol 2'

Violin Sonatas – No 18, K301; No 22, K305;
No 24, K376; No 26, K378

Isabelle Faust *vn* Alexander Melnikov *fp*
Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2361 (63' • DDD)



Long relatively neglected on disc, Mozart's 'sonatas for harpsichord or

fortepiano, with the accompaniment of a violin', as they were routinely billed, have been richly served in recent years. On modern instruments the Hyperion cycle from Alina Ibragimova and Cédric Tiberghien has proved near-definitive. There is much to relish, too, in the period-instrument recordings from Rachel Podger and Gary Cooper (Channel Classics). On the evidence of the first two volumes, the new period-instrument cycle from the seasoned pairing of Isabelle Faust and Alexander Melnikov promises to match all comers in style and fantasy.

From the puckish opening *Allegro* of K376 – one of the first works Mozart composed after setting up as a freelance composer in Vienna – you're aware of an eager creative partnership, with Faust and Melnikov delightedly seconding and undercutting each other. The crucial balance between theme and accompaniment is always cannily judged. Rhythms are pliable (they use more rubato than either of the rival duos), bass lines strongly etched and directed; and in each

of the faster movements you sense Mozart's mischievous, faintly anarchic spirit lurking beneath the urbane surface.

The sound world created by Faust's gut-strung 'Sleeping Beauty' Stradivari and Melnikov's reproduction 1790s Walter fortepiano is, of course, leaner and more abrasive than that evoked by Ibragimova and Tiberghien. The results can be controversial. Whereas the Hyperion duo heed Mozart's prescribed *grazioso* in K376's finale, Faust and Melnikov, with their percussive attack and accentuation, give the main theme a lusty bucolic flavour.

More than on the rival recordings, Faust and Melnikov vary and embellish repeats, often tweaking Mozart's lines in the process. I loved the cheeky little decorations in K301's opening *Allegro*, which, typically, emerges as opera buffa by other means. On occasion, though, the players can take rhythmic flexibility to extremes, as in the first movement of K378, where the crisp, march-like second theme is whimsically distended in the repeat. But far more often I found myself smiling at the wit and caprice of the playing: in K305's 'hunting' *Allegro di molto*, its coltish impulsiveness barely contained, or the colouristic range of the same sonata's variation finale, including Faust's brittle *sul ponticello* in the *minore* variation. At the

other end of the spectrum, the not-so-slow movements of K376 and K378 have a natural lyrical flow, enhanced by expressive ornamentation and graceful touches of portamento. True spontaneity is elusive in the recording studio. Faust and Melnikov give the illusion, at least, that they are responding to and recreating the music on the spot. Roll on Vol 3. **Richard Wigmore**

Schnittke · Smirnov · Stravinsky

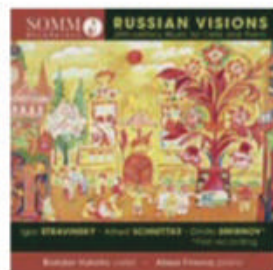
'Russian Visions'

Schnittke Cello Sonatas - No 1; No 2, 'Quasi una sonata'. Musica nostalgica (arr Rostropovich)

Smirnov Tirieli, Op 41c **Stravinsky** Suite italienne

Bozidar Vukotic vc **Alissa Firsova** pf

Somm © SOMMCD0606 (62' • DDD)



The 'meaning' of a Schnittke score has always been more than usually dependent on

the context in which it is placed and the sensibility of its executants. His First Cello Sonata of 1978 was at the heart of Leonard Elschenbroich's (virtually) all-Schnittke disc with Petr Limonov (Onyx, 3/17).

And so it is here in an interpretation more circumspect in tone with a fleeter

concluding *Largo*. Bozidar Vukotic, most familiar as a founder-member of the Tippett Quartet, and Alissa Firsova, also making her way as a composer and conductor, sound less miserablist, despite going on to include the rarer, more difficult or at any rate more fragmentary Second Sonata of 1994. Their programme trades on fractured nostalgia as much as Stygian gloom. Part of it is even jolly.

The companion works are all transmogrifications, not so much 'Russian Visions' as émigré variants. Kick-starting the recital is Stravinsky's *Suite italienne*, the Piatigorsky-assisted cello version of the suite for violin and piano Stravinsky extracted from *Pulcinella*, his ballet ostensibly 'after Pergolesi'. Schnittke's *Musica nostalgica* is the closing item, a Rostropovich-inspired reworking of part of the *Suite in the Old Style* (itself rejigged film music) that Elschenbroich features in its entirety alongside the revamp. The novelty is Dmitri Smirnov's *Tirieli*, a Blake-inspired composition by the pianist's father. Doubling as the prologue to his similarly titled 1985 opera, it is an interrupted lullaby welcoming the release from grief afforded by sleep.

Old Schnittke hands will find greater depth and moment in Natalia Gutman's various accounts of the First Cello Sonata –

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written for her after all – while Irina Schnittke, the composer's widow, is a demonstrative partner for Alexander Ivashkin in both sonatas (Chandos, 2/08). The frenzied impact of the second movement of the First Sonata is not undersold by Vukotic and Firsova but they can sound a little well-mannered. Their recital conveys the impression of an intimate lunchtime event, the piano set well back in the comfortable acoustic of the Menuhin Hall, a little woozy from our notional seat. Gavin Dixon's notes are helpful and the print is big enough to read.
David Gutman

Schubert

Winterreise, D911 (transcribed with intermezzos by Andreas Höricht)

Voyager Quartet

Solo Musica Ⓢ SM335 (50' • DDD)



Schubert's music never lies far from the arranger's pen – whether it be the composer himself, apotheosing songs for his chamber works; Liszt spinning them into piano showpieces; or more recent composers and players, greedy to get their hands on music of such divine inspiration. An arrangement of *Winterreise* for trombone and piano was issued as recently as December (Naxos), and now comes a version of 12 of its 24 songs transcribed and augmented for string quartet by Andreas Höricht, viola player of the Voyager Quartet.

There are already a number of recordings of the cycle for voice and quartet but Höricht does without the singer: 'The music is so expressive', he writes, 'and develops such an associative power that it can do without the text. It resonates unspoken.' He is inventive in altering the voicing of his arrangements, sharing the vocal line among the instruments so the feeling never builds of this *Winterreise* being 50 minutes of tune-and-accompaniment. And he may be forgiven for the prominence of the viola in a number of songs.

Each is transcribed with a fair degree of fidelity to the original but Höricht segues between songs by way of a sequence of Intermezzos of his own devising, traversing from Schubert's 19th-century language into one, while recognisably tonal and motivic, inescapably of our own time. The effect is similar, although on a smaller scale, to that of Berio's *Rendering*, in which genuine fragments of Schubert – in this

case the sketches for a symphony left unrealised at his death – are given context within music in Berio's own contemporary voice. We hear the sound world of one composer refracted through the imaginative prism of another – and not necessarily in the direction one might at first presume. Finely played, closely miked, and intriguing. **David Threasher**

Stanford

String Quartets – No 1, Op 44;

No 2, Op 45; No 6, Op 122

Dante Quartet

Somm Ⓢ SOMMCD0607 (79' • DDD)



Hats off, folks: the completion of the first full recorded cycle of Stanford's string quartets deserves a moment of acknowledgement. This third and final disc in Somm's cycle spans the period 1891 to 1911, and extends in style from the Mendelssohn-like lyricism and grace of the First Quartet to the more concise and complex (Jeremy Dibble, in his excellent booklet notes, calls it 'sinewy') A minor quartet, No 6 – a premiere recording of a work that reflects, perhaps, a growing awareness of more troubled musical times.

But really, the more you listen to this music, the more distinctively Stanford's own voice emerges. The way he uses pizzicato and tremolando to lighten the texture, as well as to add colour; the sudden flashes of wit, and above all, the warmth and lyrical impulse that's never far from the surface even in movements as brilliant as the *Prestissimo* Scherzo of No 2 – well, you can hear why Bernard Shaw (by no means an uncritical admirer of Stanford) felt that this work was 'alive with feeling from beginning to end'.

Few quartets can have more experience of Stanford's style than the Dante Quartet, and as with previous releases in this series, their performances go far beyond mere read-throughs. They're ardent, alert and thoroughly lived in. The Dantes have a flair for Stanford's moments of musical storytelling (the lyrical outbursts in the central section of No 6's second movement are almost operatic) and cellist Richard Jenkinson has an impressive head for heights. Each of the three performances generates its own momentum, creating a sense of each work's coherent musical narrative. If you've collected the set – or just want to explore – there's no need to hesitate.

Richard Bratby

'Death and the Maiden'

Leith Honey Siren Schubert String Quartet

No 14, 'Death and the Maiden', D810

(arr 12 Ensemble) **Sigur Rós** Fljótavík

(arr Button) **Tavener** The Lamb

12 Ensemble

Sancho Panza Ⓢ SPANCD002 (69' • DDD)



Mahler's string-orchestra version of Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* Quartet has

received quite a lot of attention on records, especially given that the arrangement is incomplete, consisting mainly of notations in his score. Considering, also, that these edits have more to do with the addition of articulation and dynamic markings than real arranging, the conductorless 12 Ensemble were wise to go their own way. Still, I'm left with the nagging question of what's gained by performing this work with an expanded string ensemble. There's added weight, of course, and the addition of a double bass gives a profound physicality to key junctures – as when the fierce opening motif makes a decisive return at 1'14" in the first movement. What's lost, I find, is the lean edge of the original. The desperate passage of semiquavers at 2'32", for example, simply has more bite when played one to a part.

Curiously, too, the 12 Ensemble's adaptation strikes me as less colourful than the original, seeming to be conceived entirely in finely shaded greyscale. This is not necessarily a failing, as it fits the music's overwhelmingly bleak character, and the performance is consistently and expressively compelling – note, for instance, how lovingly the violins shape their ornamented line in the slow movement's first variation. But I sense that this arrangement might be more effective in concert than it is on disc, although the recorded sound is excellent.

Oliver Leith's *Honey Siren* (siren as in 'the wailing kind, not the bird women singing on rocks', the composer says) plays to the 12 Ensemble's strengths in the music's indissoluble fusing of melody and texture. In the second movement, marked 'Full, like drips & then globs', Leith creates a sound that seems to be hanging in thick, undulating liquid globules from a progression of tonal harmonies. And the finale, 'Like dancing in slow honey', is expertly constructed, building gradually to its unexpectedly moving conclusion. There's a peculiar half-lit quality to Leith's writing that's mesmeric, and I'm eager to hear more from him.

The programme opens with an atmospheric performance of Tavener's

GRAMOPHONE *talks to ...**Leonore Piano Trio*

The violinist Benjamin Nabarro, cellist Gemma Rosefield and pianist Tim Horton share some thoughts on exploring little-known piano trios by Henry Litolff

Litolff is one of those composers known chiefly for a single piece of music. How did you discover the piano trios?

We are always looking for interesting, little-known and little-recorded works for piano trio, and Hyperion are enormously supportive and helpful in this. The standard repertoire is big enough to have no need to go further afield, but that would be a shame as so many wonderful pieces were written alongside works by what we think of as the great Classical and Romantic composers. Our recordings of previously forgotten works are joint initiatives with Hyperion, who are equally passionate about the cause.

Litolff was, of course, a pianist, so one might expect virtuoso piano-writing, but how idiomatic is the string-writing?

The piano is prominent, of course, but often the fistfuls of notes are underlying and interweaving with the themes, rather like in the piano trios of Mendelssohn. Litolff's First Trio starts with unaccompanied cello and the interval of a fifth, exactly like Beethoven's A major Cello Sonata, until the third note –

a semitone, suggesting the movement's minor key. The idea must have come from Beethoven, even if it was subconscious. The writing is very expressive and idiomatic for all three instruments. For the strings it is many things: melodious, often soloistic, even orchestral. He certainly knew how to use instrumental combinations for different effects. It's fascinating how different composers 'orchestrate' for the trio. Every composer has their own way, and Litolff's is particularly creative.

You have recorded many lesser-known trios. To what extent do you think the established canon should be expanded?

There's nothing wrong with playing well-known pieces: there's a reason they are played often. But it's not because there's a shortage of other works. Even pieces written by great composers are neglected, often in favour of ones with names, such as Beethoven's *Ghost*,



Haydn's *Gypsy Rondo* and Dvořák's *Dumky*. These are all great works, of course, but there are three other piano trios by Dvořák, all wonderful, and two of them are very rarely heard in concert. Apart from anything else, it's important to put familiar works in context – it's like filling in the gaps. And it's always interesting to discover who was influenced by whom! Litolff's piano trios certainly deserve to be heard alongside other, better-known repertoire, as well as other (certainly not all!) neglected works.

Do you plan to record Litolff's remaining Third Piano Trio?

It would be a shame not to! Watch this space!

The Lamb, in the composer's arrangement for strings, and closes with an aptly luminous arrangement of 'Fljótavík' by the Icelandic post-rock band Sigur Rós, suggesting, perhaps, there's redemption for Schubert's long-suffering maiden after all.

Andrew Farach-Colton

"Tis too late to be wise"

Blow Venus and Adonis – Act Tune **Haydn** String Quartet, Op 71 No 2 **Locke** Consort of Four Parts – Suite No 1 (excs); Suite No 2. *The Tempest* – Curtain Tune **Purcell** Chacony, Z730. Fantazias – Z736; Z742. *King Arthur* – Fairest Isle; Hornpipe. Pavan, Z752. *Timon of Athens* – Curtain Tune on a Ground

Kitgut Quartet

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2313 (53' • DDD)



Theatre tunes and viol fantasias by Purcell, Matthew Locke and John Blow with a

Haydn quartet plonked in the middle – what's going on here? In fact it's the first in a four-part series of releases exploring the origins of the string quartet, each linking a Classical master with a particular country. 'Beethoven and France' is among the curious pairings to come, but at least the presence here of Haydn's Op 71 No 2, written as it was for London in 1793, makes some sense in this context, even if its historical and developmental connections with four-part string-writing in 17th-century England appear to be more coincidental than meaningful. But hey, a CD doesn't always have to be a history lesson, does it? And as the title hints with its quote from Dryden and Purcell's *King Arthur*, hindsight doesn't always tell us everything.

Of more immediate interest is how the programme actually sounds, and the good news is that the playing of the newly formed Kitgut Quartet, using period instruments and led by Amandine Beyer, is full of freshness and life. Using violins for

viol music may take away a little delicacy but it adds definition and an agile quickness of attack that these players make telling use of; Locke's angular dances in particular acquire real athletic spring. Meanwhile the real violin-family music also benefits: Locke's Curtain Tune from *The Tempest* brews up threateningly, Purcell's Hornpipe and *Timon of Athens* Curtain Tune are full of flicks and kicks, and there is a swift but involingly passionate performance of the famous and beautiful *Chacony*.

A period performance of a Haydn quartet operates against a different set of comparisons, of course. This time softness of timbre is the principal gain, giving the music a gentle amiability and touching vulnerability not usually revealed by the fatter tone of modern strings. Some may well wish for a warmer, less whinnying violin sound in the slow movement, but there is plenty of interpretative energy and fun in the outer movements, making this Haydn the good company it should be.

Lindsay Kemp

Alicia de Larrocha

Jed Distler celebrates the pianist whose specialism in Spanish repertoire and aversion to the microphone didn't stop her from leaving a prolific and wide-ranging recorded legacy

Certain pianists become inextricably linked to specific composers or genres in the eyes of the public, such as Glenn Gould and Bach, Artur Schnabel and Beethoven, or Walter Gieseking and Debussy. Almost from the time Alicia de Larrocha emerged as a recording artist in the mid-1950s, she and late 19th- to early 20th-century Spanish piano repertoire became instantly synonymous, and remain so more than a decade after her death in 2009.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Larrocha did for Spanish music what Maria Callas did for *bel canto* operas. Callas revealed how Bellini and Donizetti heroines were complex, three-dimensional characters worth plumbing beyond the surface of pretty vocalism. Likewise, Larrocha navigated the elaborate multilevel textures that Albéniz and Granados set forth in their respective extensive piano suites *Iberia* and *Goyescas*, evoking unprecedentedly vivid subtexts and scenarios.

Then again, Granados was a key component of Larrocha's musical DNA. Her mother and her aunt were disciples of the composer, and so was her principal teacher, Frank Marshall. 'I had always felt a huge attraction to the fiery expansion of his music,' said Larrocha, 'the fascinating lyricism, the internal vein and endlessness of his inspiration, the witty and picaresque sense of his rhythm, fruit of a sense of humour full of spirit, the intimate and immense poetry, the faded perfume of his melancholy ... and the absolute absence of decadent sentimentalism, which was so in fashion during that period.'

In all four of Larrocha's commercial recordings of Granados's *Goyescas*, one readily perceives how the pianist's stylistic affinity borders on the clairvoyant. She imbues the whimsical runs and rapid mood changes of 'Los requiebros' with a sense of timing that strikes the listener as both improvisational and inevitable. There's an inherent darkness to the pulsating rhythmic snap throughout 'El fandango de candil', while few pianists

trust the seriousness of purpose and expansive timescale of 'El amor y la muerte' to the same degree as Larrocha does, with her high level of concentration and classical reserve. Critical consensus also declared Albéniz's *Iberia* as her private property, notwithstanding several worthy trespassers (Michel Block, Rosa Sabater and Esteban Sánchez). Not surprisingly, Larrocha nurtured close and

productive associations with Spanish composers of her time, such as Federico Mompou, Xavier Montsalvatge, Carlos Surinach, Óscar Esplá and Joaquín

Turina. Indeed, Turina heard the five-year-old Larrocha play, and arranged her Barcelona debut.

Yet from the very start, Marshall insisted on giving his young pupil a solid and well-rounded foundation in Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Chopin. As Larrocha told *Gramophone* in 1973, 'If you can't play Bach correctly, you can't play Spanish music.' Even early in her recording career, the pianist frequently ventured beyond her specialities. Between the late 1950s and mid-1960s the Hispavox label issued a series of releases entitled 'Páginas Célebres Para Piano', primarily devoted to a multitude of encore-type works. According to her daughter, Alicia Torra de Larrocha, the pianist approached the microphone

reluctantly, claiming that, 'The personal sound of the artist becomes lost, and without that, there is nothing.' Nevertheless, she ultimately left behind a prolific and wide-ranging discography.

Larrocha's friend Gregor Benko wrote about her hesitance over performing the core Austro-German repertoire – with the exception of Mozart – and her wish not to offer 'poor work' compared with the work of leading exponents. Yet Larrocha's concerns belied her considerable accomplishments. In the music of Bach, she unabashedly yet tastefully

In all her recordings of Goyescas, one readily perceives how her stylistic affinity borders on the clairvoyant

DEFINING MOMENTS

• 1932 – *First recordings in June, at age nine*

Chopin's Nocturne in B, Op 32 No 1, and Waltz in A minor, Op 34 No 2, both later released on the IPA label, in 1976

• 1950 – *Marries a fellow piano student*

Marries Juan Torra (1920–82), with whom she co-directs Frank Marshall's academy following their former teacher's death in 1959

• 1965 – *Returns to the US after 10 years*

Performs with New York Philharmonic in December; in January 1966 plays recital at Hunter College, after which Herbert Breslin becomes her manager, and her international career solidifies

• 1970 – *Major label beginnings*

Starts recording for Decca, beginning her longest and most fruitful major-label tenure, which lasts until 1988; this is followed by her long association with RCA, until 2003

• 2003 – *Final concert, aged 80*


Plays her final concert on November 29 in Jerez, Andalusia. For several years during retirement she provides masterclasses and private coaching until her health declines. Passes away in Barcelona on September 25, 2009



exploited the modern concert grand's full dynamic and expressive potential. Despite her tiny hands and limited stretch, she still managed to conjure up colossal sonorities in the Bach-Busoni Chaconne which never splintered nor sounded the least bit compromised (a similar case of mind over matter informs her brave and authoritative navigation of the Rachmaninov Third Concerto's large-hand-friendly terrain). She rode the textural thickets of Brahms's Second Concerto like a confident surfer staring down one big wave after another, as an unreleased live 1981 broadcast conducted by Eugen Jochum bears out. One may carp over stylistic anomalies in Larrocha's Beethoven, such as her use of Carl Reinecke's

outmoded cadenzas, but her grand-manner Schumann, sweeping Liszt Sonata in B minor and late-period Chopin *Polonaise-fantaisie* are unambiguously masterful and idiomatic.

Above all, Larrocha was a pianist's pianist. Waiting outside the dressing room to congratulate her after her November 21, 1982, recital at New York's Avery Fisher Hall were none other than Claudio Arrau, Vladimir Horowitz and John Browning, who recalled: 'As she came off the elevator she saw us,

then went directly in front of Horowitz (whom she had never met), knelt before him, and kissed both his hands. Horowitz beamed and said, "My dear, you should have played more. I think there is more music in these little hands." 

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



Albéniz *Iberia*. Navarra **Granados** *Goyescas*
Alicia de Larrocha *pf*

Decca (Albéniz: 10/73; Granados: 12/77)

Besides the effortless technical mastery informing the third and arguably most satisfying of her four recorded versions, Larrocha internalises and inhabits these repertoire pillars to a profound extent that is more easily experienced than described.

Instrumental



Michelle Assay hears Schubert from the late Dina Ugorskaja:

'Within the state of pervasive lingering, if you can go with it, she explores some precious details' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 65](#)



Patrick Rucker listens to some recent Liszt recordings:

'Vincent inhabits the music's often mercurial narratives, changing posture and mood with the alacrity of a master actor' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 68](#)

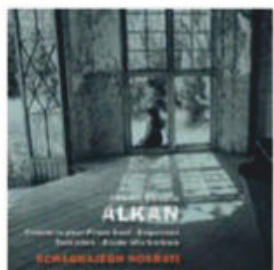
Alkan

Concerto for Solo Piano, Op 39 Nos 8-10.

Esquisses, Op 63 – selection. Étude alla barbaro. Toccata, Op 75

Schaghajegh Nosrati *pf*

AVI-Music © AVI855 3104 (73' • DDD)



Schaghajegh Nosrati (b1989, Bochum, Germany), a new name to me, is one of

very few women pianists to have recorded any Alkan. She begins with a selection of three pieces from the 48 *Esquisses* (miniature tone poems published in 1861), which alone give an idea of the variety and range of his output. In 'Le vision' (No 1), 'Le staccatissimo' (No 2) and 'En songe' (No 48) you get in turn a plaintive piece of disarming simplicity, a virtuoso staccato study and an experimental dreamlike essay in which the pianist is requested to keep both pedals depressed all the way through, ending with the unusual instruction *svaporandosi* (Alkan's Italian for 'evaporating'). The devilishly tricky *Toccata* follows (one of his final works), then five more *Esquisses* including 'Les soupirs' (Sighs), which to the innocent ear could easily pass for Debussy. These are punctuated by a work without opus number, the *Étude alla barbaro*. Personally, I think *Esquisses* are far more effective when cherry-picked like this – and Nosrati characterises each one with great eloquence and empathy – though if you want to hear all four books in sequence look no further than Steven Osborne (Hyperion, 9/03).

The main work is the *Concerto for Solo Piano*. Paul Wee's astonishing recording (BIS, 11/19) takes its place alongside those of Marc-André Hamelin (both of them – Music & Arts, 8/93; Hyperion, A/07) and Jack Gibbons (ASV, 11/95). Nosrati's does not quite reach their exalted heights but her playing of this leviathan of the repertoire often brings out textual details missing in the recordings by the three men, not least the melodic and rhythmic

importance of the first subject of Étude No 8 (the Concerto's first movement) and the myriad ways in which Alkan uses it throughout. No mere right-hand note-spinner she. Only in one section does she sound unconvincing: the four or five pages before the fermata at 11'39". Hamelin, whose Alkan recordings first inspired Nosrati to investigate the composer, plays in long paragraphs rather than phrases, his urgent forward momentum bringing more cohesion to the huge structure (note the difference in timings: Hamelin 28'14"; Nosrati 32'06"). In the finale, one could argue that Hamelin, with his utterly astonishing dexterity, forges ahead a little too enthusiastically, whereas Nosrati, though far from being studio-bound, displays a more restrained exuberance. She is unreservedly a musician with a formidable technique. Moreover, the piano is very well recorded – and she adds her own most perceptive essay on the music. Brava!

This is the fourth outstanding Alkan disc to come my way in as many months. At this rate, conservatoire professors and concert promoters will have to start acknowledging Alkan as standard repertoire. Oh wait! Was that a pig I saw flying past my study window? **Jeremy Nicholas**

JS Bach · Bartók

JS Bach French Suite No 5, BWV816. Keyboard Partita No 2, BWV826 Bartók Out of Doors, Sz81. Suite, Op 14 Sz62

Julien Libeer *pf*

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2651 (63' • DDD)



Julien Libeer's Bach takes full advantage of the modern concert grand's dynamic and

timbral resources while keeping within stylistically acceptable parameters. The G major *French Suite* receives a lovely performance, featuring imaginative embellishments in the Allemande's repeats, terraced textures in the Courante and a

Sarabande where the melody spins fetchingly over lute-like support in the left hand. Note, too, the Loure's intriguingly differentiated arpeggiated chords and embellishments, plus a Gigue that goes like the wind.

While most pianists play the introduction to the C minor Partita's Sinfonia loudly and assertively, Libeer's unconventionally mellow vantage point allows for an assiduous transition into the movement's main section. His leisurely Allemande is suave yet uneventful compared to the more intricate phrasing in Igor Levit's similarly paced interpretation (Sony, 10/14). The remaining inner movements continue along an understated trajectory, but Libeer's brisk and incisively articulated Capriccio will wake you up!

In the first movement of Bartók's *Out of Doors* suite, Libeer adheres closer to the composer's *Pesante* directive, allowing the themes and percussive accents room to breathe and to interact. Libeer's 'Barcarolla' is slower and stricter next to the animated lilt of Beatrice Rana (Harmonia Mundi, 2/14) and Florent Boffard (Mirare, 1/19), and he arguably underplays the tangy dissonances of the 'Musettes'. Yet Libeer gauges the delicate clusters and slow octave *cantabiles* of 'The Night's Music' with shimmering impact, and juggles the polyrhythmic strands in 'The Chase' with the utmost control and clarity, while keeping the momentum alive.

The opening *Allegretto* of Bartók's Op 14 Suite makes an elegant impression in Libeer's hands but I hear more idiomatic tartness in the angular, speech-like phrasing of Jenő Jandó (Naxos, 11/01) and Zoltán Kocsis (Philips, 11/94). He navigates the Scherzo's subtle tempo changes perfectly, yet his *marcatissimo* declamations lack the nervous energy of Géza Anda's wonderful broadcast recording (Audite, 10/08). The last two movements, however, benefit from Libeer's full-bodied sonorities and sensitivity to the composer's harmonic resonances. Like most pianists, Libeer makes a short separation between the third and fourth movements, rather



Beethoven for four hands: Peter Hill and Benjamin Frith hold exhilaration and astringence in balance

than eliding them *attacca* as Bartók's score indicates. A pity, for this seamless transition is quite effective as heard in Jandó's recording and, of course, in the composer's own 78rpm rendition.

A pretentious booklet essay presents a high-handed, sloppily argued case for programming Bach and Bartók suites back-to-back on the present disc, but you can ignore it and simply focus on the best of what Libeer has to offer. **Jed Distler**

Beethoven

'Works for Piano Four Hands'

Grosse Fuge, Op 134. Three Marches, Op 45. Sonata, Op 6. Six Variations on 'Ich denke dein', WoO74. Eight Variations on a Theme by Count von Waldstein, WoO67

Peter Hill, Benjamin Frith *pf*
Delphian © DCD34221 (49' • DDD)



In an absorbing booklet essay, Peter Hill encourages us to take seriously Beethoven's modest output for piano duet as a microcosmic journey through the composer's maturation. Arranged here in chronological order, it sets out in unassuming fashion with the two-movement, six-minute Sonata likely

written for the 20-something teacher to play with his pupils. Even at this early stage in his career, however, Beethoven understood how to sidestep the genre's pitfalls that make countless similar pieces more fun for players than listeners.

Hill and his longstanding duet partner Benjamin Frith understand them, too. Whichever of them plays *secondo* – in the session photograph above it's Frith, but they could well swap between pieces, and the booklet doesn't say – keeps the bass parts well defined and lightly articulated. Even so, I am not persuaded that Beethoven's pair of variation sets are elevated above countless contemporary similar pieces except in the stealthy harmonies and access to some briefly glimpsed Elysium in the finale of the 21-year-old composer's variations on an undistinguished theme by Count Waldstein, just eight years his elder and among his earliest patrons.

Not even Hill and Frith's sprightly tempos and nicely clipped, Prussian phrasing can quite rescue the Three Marches, Op 45, either, from the fault of going round and round and round that Schubert would in time turn into a virtue in otherwise strikingly similar works such as the three *Marches heroïques*, D602, with much more lyrical secondary themes. Inevitably, nothing among these

occasional works really prepares the listener for the impact of the *Grosse Fuge*, which in its piano duet form sounds less like a reduction of the string quartet and more of a privately set challenge to outstrip the *Wanderer* Fantasy (composed four years earlier) in devising the most ambitious and various contrapuntal textures possible within the confines of a single keyboard.

Beethoven's own arrangement has been marginally tweaked by Hill and Frith to avoid 'gridlock' (Hill's term), and their performance holds exhilaration and astringence in balance with remarkable success. By contrast, Takahashi and Lehmann (Audite) underscore an element of caprice that may occasionally be encountered in quartet performances, and the work's qualities of unhinged invention are pushed thrillingly to the limits of sense by Amy and Sara Hamann on the only available recording with fortepiano (and also piano – a release on the Grand Piano label that presents the only serious rival to this one). To listen to Hill and Frith, as much as to The Lindsays – perhaps tellingly, the recording is dedicated to the memory of Peter Cropper – is to grasp afresh why 19th-century commentators had problems thinking of the *Grosse Fuge* as music at all.

Peter Quantrill

GRAMOPHONE *Focus*

BEETHOVEN THROUGH SAY'S EYES

Jed Distler gets to know Fazil Say's highly personalised accounts of Beethoven's piano sonatas



Interventionist Beethoven: Fazil Say brings his composer's imagination to the music of Beethoven, with mixed results

Beethoven

'Complete Piano Sonatas'

Fazil Say *pf*

Warner Classics (B) (C) 9029 53802-4

(10h 4' • DDD)



In the booklet notes accompanying Fazil Say's Beethoven sonata cycle, the pianist writes: 'As I work I make annotations above the music using some 300 different coloured pens. Sometimes I write out the music itself with coloured pens, using a different kind of mathematics. When I start to sense an impetus, a feeling that I can do anything I want with the music, I call that the "equilibrium". This equilibrium announces "I'm here".'

The self-absorbed tone of this paragraph extends to Say's Beethoven interpretations. They generally evoke an alternative reality where *forte* means *piano*, where legato means *détaché*, where

primary melodies are upstaged by secondary bass lines and so forth. A key component of Say's communicative *modus operandi* concerns his propensity for once taboo yet newly fashionable mannerisms such as arpeggiating chords at will and desynchronising the hands. Granted, András Schiff also does this throughout his own Beethoven cycle, yet with far more specificity, purposefulness and discretion. By contrast, Say's effect-mongering undermines the stark dynamic contrasts and harmonic tension at the opening of Op 90, while allowing the well-balanced part-writing in Op 101's first movement to aimlessly wilt. Perhaps Op 49 No 1's first movement reveals Say's grandiloquence at its most pretentious and inflated. And notwithstanding his impressive technical sheen, he sometimes overpedals, as in Op 78's *Allegro vivace* and Op 101's march: here the younger Claudio Arrau's amazing balances and mega-secure leaps in the latter surpass Say's slightly flustered execution.

Furthermore, Say's tempo choices often miss or ignore Beethoven's point. Notice,

for example, how Say parses Op 27 No 1's introduction with the same flippant insensitivity he brings to Op 10 No 3's harrowing slow movement, yet the pianist neutralises the middle section's sudden dramatic outburst, much in the way he underplays Op 10 No 1's relentless finale. He pushes Op 28's opening *Allegro* to the point where the right-hand runs have no breathing room, in contrast to the dragging *Andante*. He favours conservative tempos in the *Hammerklavier* Sonata's outer movements and delivers a rather heavy-handed and foursquare Scherzo that flattens out the Trio section's cross-rhythms. In the great *Adagio sostenuto*, Say's pianism ravishes and seduces, yet I take issue with the pianist's aesthetic premise; particularly in how rhapsodic speeding up and slowing down dissipates the dramatic momentum that Beethoven constructs by way of his gradually expanding textural terrain and carefully scaled dynamics.

As with his earlier *Appassionata* recording (Naïve), Say continues to take the *Allegro ma non troppo* finale so unyieldingly fast that you fear for his safety in the *Presto* coda.

But no worries: Say doesn't accelerate into the coda, he simply plays it at the same tempo! In contrast to his banged-out earlier Op 111, Say contains himself within a quieter framework, yet still dispatches the Arietta's third variation too quickly for the dotted rhythms to clearly and distinctly register; Pollini's late-1970s studio version remains the paradigm.

Other interpretations toe a fine line between unorthodoxy and vulgarity, sometimes within the same sonata, or even in the same movement. Some listeners may find Op 2 No 2's finale glib and fatuous but I warm to Say's businesslike demeanour and the way he resists taking the main theme's last three notes for a swan dive (an annoying habit among pianists). Op 10 No 2's first movement strives too hard for effect but Say shades the finale's staccatos with imagination and variety. The concluding movements of Op 7 and the *Pathétique* have a directness and flow that compensate for Say's fussy detailing elsewhere.

Following a lovely and straightforward presentation of Op 26's first-movement theme and first variation, Say reverts to ugly and machine-like mode for Var 2 and trivialises the *minore* Var 4's anguish with exaggeratingly detached articulation. The toccata-like *Allegro* finale's carefully balanced linear interplay makes up for Say's slow and static Funeral March.

Similarly, the staccato chords in Op 14 No 2's *Andante* emerge like separate, overwrought entities, whereas the outer movements' energised and sophisticated phrasing channel Say's creativity positively. The pianist's *Moonlight* Sonata vastly improves upon its predecessor. Here Say makes a compellingly sustained and concentrated case for taking the *Adagio* almost as slowly as in Solomon's famously protracted interpretation. Perhaps Op 22's inherent humour absorbs Say's *affettuoso* aesthetic more readily than in most of the other sonatas; listen to the witty left-hand accentuations in the *Allegro con brio*'s second theme or the Menuetto's dynamic gradations, and you may well agree.

Eventually the initial shock and awe subsides, and Say's titillating expressive touches wind up sounding as predictable as the vocal groans, grunts and grimaces accompanying nearly every crescendo. The net result is a highly calculated and calibrated pianism that draws more attention to Fazıl Say than to the composer he purports to serve with 300 pens at the ready. **G**

Hundsnes

Seven Clavinatas. Downtoned Beats.

Piano Sonata No 1

Laura Mikkola *pf*

Grand Piano (F) GP800 (65' • DDD)



The Norwegian Svein Hundsnes (b1951) has composed three

symphonies, concertos, two string quartets and several other works, but until now has been primarily a local phenomenon. Grand Piano's claim that he is 'one of Norway's most important living composers' should be treated with caution; this is the only available recording of any of his music in the Presto Classical listings, and there is no entry at all in the Norwegian equivalent, **grappa.no**. Even YouTube offers little aside from this disc's tracks.

Listening to these piano pieces, beautifully and strongly played by Laura Mikkola, he strikes me as something of a crossover artist, and I gather he has worked a good deal in jazz, rock and 'even funk'. This suggests he is not unlike the better-known Helge Iberg, who has also released classically orientated music in recent years. Hundsnes's piano style seems to be rooted in the Romantic tradition, with a slight French accent. At times, as in several of the *Clavinata* pieces (2015-18), Hundsnes seems to be reimagining Prokofiev-style toccatas. Hundsnes defines a 'clavinata' as a 'concentrated one-movement piece, which might have the intensity of a toccata', adding that the form is more versatile. Although separate works, they go together either in small groups or as a larger set quite well, like a series of self-sufficient studies.

The two larger works operate in the same stylistic area. Sonata No 1 (2008-18) is cast in three movements, the outer ones turbulent and energetic framing an étude-like central span. *Downtoned Beats* (2013-15) is to my mind the most impressive and complete work here, a dance suite in four movements mixing elements and forms from the Baroque as well as modern pop music, though without any hint of pastiche, and creates something new. Grand Piano's sound is excellent. **Guy Rickards**

Schubert

Piano Sonata No 21, D960. Drei Klavierstücke, D946. Six Moments musicaux, D780

Dina Ugorskaja *pf*

AVI-Music (M) (2) AVI8553107 (110' • DDD)



I doubt if the teacher who once banned the 23-year-old me from playing Schubert's

last piano sonata because she thought I hadn't suffered enough to be worthy of playing it could have accused Dina Ugorskaja of the same thing. Ugorskaja lost her battle with cancer in September 2019, at the age of 46, and this all-Schubert disc is in a way the Russian-born, German-based pianist's communication from beyond the grave. The spectre of death is omnipresent, and not only in the programme – that B flat Sonata alongside the three late *Klavierstücke* – but even in the cover photo. Her short-cropped hair instead of her hallmark Medusa-like locks, together with her obviously frail frame, are heartbreaking reminders of the fragility of life.

Maybe the tragic context of the album shouldn't affect our experience; but it inevitably does. So too does the recorded sound, which is surprisingly non-atmospheric (compare with Uchida on Philips, Radu Lupu on Decca and Schiff on ECM). Then there is Ugorskaja's slow and often static approach, epitomised in her double-length bass trill at the end of the first phrase of the sonata. This certainly fits with her booklet-note remark – 'in this music time occasionally seems to stand still'. Within this state of pervasive lingering, if you can go with it, she explores some precious details. Hear, for instance, the subtle yet magical response in the bass at 17'47" or her astute attention to pedalling in the second movement. In fact, all through the disc, every single motif is charged with meaning.

But one person's meaningful is another's mannered and self-conscious. Apart from placing the flow of the music at the risk of stagnation, Ugorskaja's absorption in details results in something akin to a visitor to the Sistine Chapel who is forced to look only at the extraordinary details of individual figures on a screen and to leave without having taken in the grandeur of the overall conception. For the bigger picture I find myself drawn back to Uchida with her aloof poetry, to Richter's transcendental stoicism and to Maria Yudina's spiritual abandon (her opening bars are even slower than Ugorskaja but she creates a true dramatic whirlpool by juxtaposing them with ecstatic outbursts). The other trap with the B flat Sonata, which Ugorskaja falls into, is that by overcharging the first two movements

semantically and emotionally, the narrative does not carry over with any logic into the exuberant Scherzo and finale. Lupu and Schiff both avoid this pitfall by avoiding an excess of self-indulgence in the first two movements and creating a balanced structure.

The transcendental trajectory of the sonata is reflected in the rest of the programme, from the darkness of the three *Klavierstücke* to the light of the *Moments musicaux*. The former are among Schubert's works that need some selling if they are not to overstay their welcome; Ugorskaja is impassioned but heavy here, and no match for Uchida's mercurial characterisation and limpid tone, or Schiff's magical evocations on his fortepiano. There are moments of true delight in Ugorskaja's exploration of the chiaroscuro of the *Moments musicaux* and somehow, perhaps because of their brevity, their wholeness does not suffer as much as in the sonata from overemphasis on detail. Yet again it is worth turning to Lupu every now and then, if only to let some air in.

Michelle Assay

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

Uchida (8/98^R, 9/02^R) (PHIL) 475 6282PB8

Sonata No 21, Moments musicaux – selected comparisons:

Lupu (4/83^R, 11/94^R, 3/06) (DECC) 475 7074DC4

Schiff (6/15) (ECM) 481 1572

Sonata – selected comparisons:

Richter (12/06) (BBCL) BBCL4196-2

Yudina (DANT) HPC123

'Canadian Organ Music'

Bales *Petite Suite* **RW Henderson** *Chromatic Partita* **Laurin** *Symphony No 1, Op 36* **Willan** *Introduction, Passacaglia and Fugue*

Rachel Mahon *org*

Delphian © DCD34234 (61' • DDD)

Played on the organ of Coventry Cathedral



It is difficult to imagine a more impressive location for these four substantial

organ works by Canadian composers of the past 100 years. Outside Canada (and, it has to be said, largely inside it too) the great wealth of Canadian organ music is little known, and there are not that many Canadian organists or organs that can pay it full justice. Rachel Mahon is a Canadian organist who is currently based at Coventry Cathedral as assistant director of music, and combines her knowledge and background in Canadian organ music with her knowledge and understanding of the magnificent Harrison and Harrison instrument in Coventry.

Healey Willan – dare one label him the 'father' of modern Canadian organ music? – is represented by his grand, majestic *Introduction, Passacaglia and Fugue*, which might be said to be the one Canadian work that has found a place at the core of the recitalist's repertory. Here is as stirring a performance as you could wish for, greatly enhanced by an outstanding recording from Delphian that encompasses the vast dynamic and pitch range of the Coventry organ superbly.

Gerald Bales's *Petite Suite* acknowledges in its title the deep-seated French influence in Canadian music, although the sparse and acerbic musical language of the suite's three brief movements seems more akin to the music of Kenneth Leighton. Hints of the French influence can be identified in Ruth Watson Henderson's *Chromatic Partita*, where a set of eight short variations around a chorale melody employs various solo stops and combinations much in the manner of the French Classical School, and includes haunting string chords in the style of Alain (Var 6) and concludes with a toccata firmly in the post-Dupré manner.

Thoroughly rooted in the French tradition is the most recent work on the disc, the *Symphony No 1 for organ* of 2008 by Rachel Laurin. She takes the Franck/Widor concept of the solo organ symphony and uses its four movements to explore the full colouristic scope of a modern organ. The second movement is a Scherzo thoroughly in the mould of Vierne, while the closing Toccata bears remarkable similarities to that by Marcel Lanquetuit. But this is nevertheless a fine and distinctive work, greatly enhanced by this splendid performance. Rachel Mahon has done Canadian organ music proud in this outstanding recording. **Marc Rochester**

'#CelloUnlimited'

Casals *El cant dels ocells* **Crumb** *Solo Cello Sonata* **Henze** *Serenade* **Hindemith** *Solo Cello Sonata, Op 25 No 3* **Kodály** *Solo Cello Sonata, Op 8* **Müller-Schott** *Cadenza* **Prokofiev** *Solo Cello Sonata, Op 134*

Daniel Müller-Schott *vc*

Orfeo © C984 191 (74' • DDD)



Daniel Müller-Schott ends this formidable unaccompanied recital with Pablo

Casals's *Song of the Birds*, played with the intense focus, the sense of line and the gleaming purity of tone that characterises

the whole disc. And yet there's an elegiac quality about its final, superbly controlled fade into silence; something that sets the seal on the air of melancholy that pervades the second half of a fascinating programme. Müller-Schott has dedicated the disc to the memory of his father, and despite the disc's trendy-vicar title (do you pronounce the hashtag?), there's something here that goes beyond virtuosity.

Which is saying something. Even today, it's unusual to hear Kodály's stupendous Op 8 Sonata played with such precision, such aplomb and such effortless finesse. You wonder if the music is even supposed to sound this polished – whether Kodály's crunchy double-stops and sudden, dizzying leaps from C-string thunder to whirling stratospheric passagework should feel quite so effortless. And perhaps something of János Starker's earthiness and air of mystery is missing. But the drama, sweep and sheer command of Müller-Schott's performance decisively silence any doubts.

I doubt, too, that there are more nuanced or atmospheric accounts in existence of Hindemith's brooding Sonata or the nine Shakespeare-inspired miniatures that make up Henze's *Serenade*. The colours of Müller-Schott's pizzicato, alone, seem limitless: sometimes brittle as bullet-points, swerving playfully upwards in Henze's sixth-movement Tango or fanning softly out to throw a haze of mourning over the opening phrases of George Crumb's 1955 Sonata. Müller-Schott's ability to inflect a single line of music makes even works such as Prokofiev's slightly dubious reconstructed Sonata and his own entertainingly eclectic Cadenza repay re-listening. He certainly has something to say. **Richard Bratby**

'Italian Inspirations'

JS Bach *Keyboard Concerto (after Marcello)*, BWV974 **Dallapiccola** *Quaderno musicale di Annalibera* **Liszt** *Après une lecture du Dante, S161 No 7* **St François d'Assise: La prédication aux oiseaux, S175 No 1** **Rachmaninov** *Variations on a Theme of Corelli, Op 42*

Alessio Bax *pf*

Signum © SIGCD611 (65' • DDD)



The mesmerising *Adagio* of the Marcello-Bach Concerto was

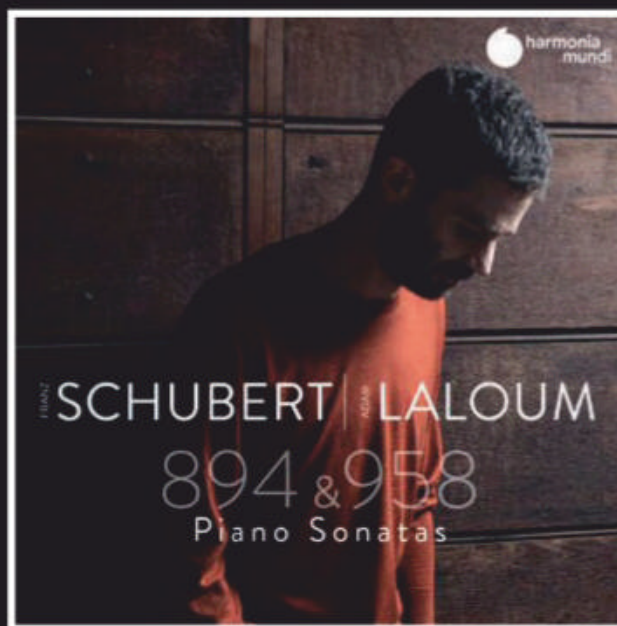
memorably recorded by Edwin Fischer in 1931. You rarely hear all three movements. Yet here are their second memorable

New collaboration



FRANZ SCHUBERT | ADAM LALOUM
894 & 958
Piano Sonatas

Barely two years separate the monumental Sonata in G (October 1826) from its sister in C minor (September 1828), the first of a trilogy composed on the threshold of death, which was to win the struggle a few weeks later. Two years – and a whole world! Rarely presented together, these two Schubert masterpieces are key works in the repertoire, but also in the aesthetic explorations of Adam Laloum, who here makes his first recording for harmonia mundi.



HMM 902660

Photo Julien Benhamou

Photo © Jean-Baptiste Millot



harmoniamundi.com

GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

A LISZTIAN ROUND-UP

Patrick Rucker selects some recent Liszt recordings from pianists of various nationalities and finds a variety of style and approach



Secure grasp of Liszt's rhetoric: Guillaume Vincent excels in some of the composer's brooding masterpieces

These recordings offer a broad cross section of Liszt's piano music – from the well-known to the obscure – and include two volumes in Naxos's ongoing series of the complete solo piano works.

Shin-Heae Kang impresses as a pianist of considerable technical accomplishment, intent on placing a personal stamp on everything she plays. The *Grandes études de Paganini* are the centrepiece of her recording, and throughout Kang maintains admirable textural clarity. She never forces. In the E flat Étude, No 2, interlocking octaves are played with the same insouciant ease as single-note runs. 'La campanella' is masterfully paced. The E major, No 4, evokes the precision of a fine jeweller in charming music-box effects. The ubiquitous 24th Caprice is refreshingly light and crisp.

Yet certain tendencies that work in the context of the smaller-form Études – coming to a near full stop to delineate phrases and sections; focus on detail at the expense of the greater picture; and a certain calculated distance that holds emotional affects at arm's length – seem ill-suited to the larger canvases on her programme. The *Dante Sonata* strikes as disjunct and lacking in sweep, primarily due to bizarrely clipped cadences, rubato that feels more imposed than organic and variously harsh, dry and brittle sonorities.

In the *Spanish Rhapsody*, thematic material, *fioritura* cadenzas and virtuoso passagework are given equal weight. These undifferentiated background and foreground textures, combined with a rhythmic orientation more wilful than remotely Spanish, rob the work of a good deal of its defining character.

In contrast, the grasp of Liszt's characteristic rhetoric shown by **Guillaume Vincent** seems natural and secure. Unlike Kang, Vincent subscribes to the idea that when Liszt notates use of the pedal, he may have had some specific instrumental sonority in mind.

He plays the 1863 version of the Impressionistic *Berceuse*, first composed in 1854, with appealing tenderness and delicacy. The three *Liebesträume* could not be more passionate and conform so closely to the scansion of the poems by Uhland and Freiligrath that it's easy to imagine them sung.

Vincent imbues each of the three Polish dances with vivid character. The zesty *Mazurka brillante* is sparkingly vivacious. The C minor Polonaise exudes a haughty melancholy, relieved by a Trio played with a palpable sense of longing. The E major Polonaise is all joyful triumph, decorated with *fioritura* passages of uncommon delicacy. Listening to these lithe, eloquent performances, one wonders how, in other hands, such

splendid pieces can often seem unwieldy.

Vincent's gifts are perhaps heard to their greatest advantage in the two Ballades. He inhabits their often mercurial narratives, changing posture and mood with the alacrity of a master actor. From the introduction of the First Ballade, 'Le chant du croisé', Vincent holds the two disparate elements – the searching recitative and the sprightly playful response – in perfect balance. It is this deft juxtaposition of vividly contrasted elements that makes the eventual appearance of the 'Crusaders' Hymn' seem not surprising but inevitable. The B minor Ballade is given an especially fine performance. The immense rolling-bass figures, and their later iteration as broken octaves in treble and bass, create an ominous roar while speaking with bell-like clarity. The contrasting lyrical passages are sheer poetry, their polyphony exquisitely voiced. When Liszt introduces the transformed principal theme into the coda, it's as though aspiration itself has become unfettered and rises in resplendent apotheosis. Musically speaking, it isn't easy to bring off such a powerful moment of catharsis – it involves pacing, judiciously wrought textures, strategic massing of sound and silence, subtle coloration and the ability to sustain a line. Guillaume Vincent excels in all of these facets.

Wojciech Waleczek already has two Liszt recordings to his credit, including both the 1838 and 1851 sets of *Paganini Études* (Capriccio, 5/17). On the new disc, it is misleading to call these *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses* the '1847 version', since Liszt never published them as such. They are in fact transcribed from the 'N9 Sketchbook' in the Weimar archives, plus several extracted leaves now at the Paris Bibliothèque Nationale, and were first published in their entirety in 1998.

So why explore these drafts of a work that Liszt thoroughly transformed and published in 1853 as *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*, particularly when the mature cycle has been so well recorded by, among others, Steven Osborne (Hyperion, 4/04) and the late Brigitte Engerer (Mirare, 2011)? The answer surely is the snapshot they give of Liszt in the heat of inspiration. Rarely do we get to peer over the shoulder of any composer for so detailed a view of what lies on the desk.

Waleczek is a sincere and sympathetic guide. He is sufficiently technically equipped to allow his imagination full flight. He has a strong dramatic instinct and brings a sense of proportion when Liszt grows discursive. Perhaps most importantly,

Waleczek conveys an aura of rapture to this music, which was initially a response to the eponymous 1830 collection of poems by Alphonse de Lamartine. Whatever one's relationship to the *Harmonies* and their evolution, this disc offers sensually beautiful piano-playing.

Of all Liszt's varied piano cycles, the least known is his last. A year before his death, he composed seven 'portraits' of his compatriots: four statesmen, two poets and a composer. Typical of his late style, yet standing somehow apart, the *Hungarian Historical Portraits* comprise Liszt's valedictory to his homeland.

Jenő Jandó presents the *Portraits* alongside a gathering of some better-known late works chosen for context. Among the individual pieces, the third *Lugubre gondola* and the *Weinen, Klagen* Prelude, precursor to the better-known Variations on the same Bach theme for piano and for organ, are particularly interesting.

This recording of the *Hungarian Historical Portraits*, on the other hand, adds little to our understanding of these formidable pieces. Jandó seems content to take them at face value, replicating the hollow bluster that has marred previous interpretations. 'Széchenyi', 'Deák' and 'Eötvös' exhibit characteristic swagger but are played at such relentless volume they seem virtually monochromatic. Rhythmic rigidity diminishes the inherent pathos of 'Petőfi' and 'Mosonyi'. In 1986 the doyen of Hungarian Liszt scholars, Dezső Legány, discovered that the order of the posthumously published *Portraits* had been jumbled and offered a restoration based on Liszt's intentions. Strangely, Jandó ignores Legány's research and presents the pieces in their old, incorrect order of publication, diminishing the potential effectiveness of the cycle as a whole. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



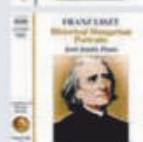
Liszt 'Kaleidoscope'
Shin-Heae Kang
Oehms (P) OC1713



Liszt 'Black Liszt'
Guillaume Vincent
Naïve (P) V5450



Liszt 'Complete Piano Music, Vol 53'
Wojciech Waleczek
Naxos (B) 8 573773



Liszt 'Complete Piano Music, Vol 54'
Jenő Jandó
Naxos (B) 8 574059

outing in as many years. Víkingur Ólafsson included the work on a disc that helped him to win the Artist of the Year at last year's *Gramophone* Awards (DG, 11/18). He and Bax take different but equally convincing views, Ólafsson lighter in tone and touch in the outer movements (much like Olivier Cavé on his lovely Italianate Bach disc – Aeon, 2013); Bax is more muscular, almost emulating the beefy sound of a modern harpsichord, while adopting a hauntingly delicate voice and, for me, more judicious tempo for the *Adagio*.

Bach's version of the oboe concerto by his contemporary (Marcello was slightly older) is followed by Rachmaninov's take on 'La folia', a theme not written by Corelli but used by him in 1700 as the basis for 23 variations in his Violin Sonata, Op 5 No 12. Bax's is a most satisfying account (beautifully recorded, incidentally, by Anna Barry and Mike Hatch in the Britten Studio, Snape Maltings) and beneficially over a minute faster than his earlier recording of the work (Warner Classics, 11/04).

After that come the 11 fragments that make up Dallapiccola's *Quaderno musicale di Annalibera* ('Annalibera's musical notebook') composed in 1952 and dedicated to his daughter on her eighth birthday. I wonder what she made of such uncompromising dodecaphonic writing with its explicit references to Bach. After instruction, I did manage to pick out the notes of his musical cypher but missed the 'ephemeral displays of contrapuntal ingenuity' referred to in the booklet as I did the 'lyricism and tenderness beneath its macho veneer'. The work sounds rather dated to my ears.

Dallapiccola's hushed, sparsely notated familial gift elides almost seamlessly into Liszt's *St Francis of Assisi* tone poem, most affectingly realised. But the standout performance is what follows – a spellbinding account of the *Dante* Sonata in which Bax masterfully combines scrupulous observation of Liszt's agogics and dynamics (trusting the composer here really does pay dividends) with quite thrilling bravura in which he throws caution to the wind. Few accounts of the first two pages are so filled with menace and mystery. The realisation of Liszt's performance instructions – *quasi improvisato, con intimo sentimento, un poco marcato*, releasing the sustain pedal when directed – increases one's admiration for the composer as much as for his interpreter. This Italian's salute to his home country is inspired indeed. **Jeremy Nicholas**

'Mit Humor'

Bartók Piano Sonata, Sz80 **Haydn** Piano Sonata, HobXVI:50 **Prokofiev** Four Pieces, Op 4
Schumann Humoreske, Op 20

Matthieu Cognet *pf*

Odradek (P) ODRCD384 (69' • DDD)



A personal note: I first learnt about the New York-based French pianist Matthieu

Cognet through our mutual pianist friend Fanny Azzuro, who simply raved about her colleague's gifts. I next heard a CD drawn from his 2011 Paris debut, which included a stunning performance of the Theme and Variations movement from Dutilleux's Piano Sonata, and equally strong readings of works by Schumann, Rachmaninov and Scarlatti.

His newest solo CD, if anything, proves more distinctive. Even in a catalogue overloaded with excellent recordings of Schumann's *Humoreske*, Cognet's integrity, idiomatic perception and refined mastery draw you into the composer's volatile sound world. In the opening section, Cognet conveys an appropriately muted mood by keeping the long melody, the inner-voice accompaniment and the bass lines in judicious perspective, as he also does later on in the combative *Sehr lebhaft* section. Cognet doesn't launch into the *Sehr rasch und leicht* with, say, Kirill Gerstein's rollicking abandon, yet his carefully scaled dynamics make dramatic impact where it counts. He's less febrile than Emanuel Ax in the *Hastig* section and takes special care to bring out the stepwise bass lines many pianists flatten out.

In Prokofiev's 'Suggestion diabolique', Cognet brings out the music behind the muscle, and it's good to hear this warhorse in its original context alongside Op 4's three other equally evocative pieces. Cognet generates witty point and sparkle at the start of the first movement in Haydn's C major Sonata, yet doesn't sustain his liveliness of mind as the music unfolds. But his telling distinctions between legato and detached articulation in the slow movement and his clever timing of the finale's unexpected silences compensate. As for Bartók's 1926 Sonata, Cognet orchestrates the music rather than banging it out. Rhythmic drive takes a back seat to giving the outer movements their lyrical due, and the imitative writing takes revealing conversational wing. The intimate yet full-bodied sound does Cognet's beautiful tone justice. Keep your eye on this superb pianist and intelligent musician – I know I will! **Jed Distler**

Tristan Murail

Liam Cagney finds much to celebrate in the work of the pioneering French spectralist composer who studied with Messiaen

As co-inventor of spectral music (with Gérard Grisey), Tristan Murail is one of the most influential composers of the past 50 years. Without spectralism's rich colours and blurring of harmony and timbre, we wouldn't have the music of Julian Anderson, Kaaija Saariaho or Jonathan Harvey. Murail 'arrived' as a composer in 1980, when the Orchestre National de France gave a portrait concert in Paris. The day after the performances of his *Gondwana* (1980) and *Les courants de l'espace* (1979), alongside Sibelius's Seventh Symphony, he received an approving letter from his old composition teacher, who had been in the audience. 'I believe you have realised what electronicism was for a long time searching for,' wrote Messiaen, 'with a beauty of sonority rarely attained in contemporary music.'

The works that came after his exchange of ideas with Grisey had few peers for vision and excitement in 1970s new music

As a composition student at the Paris Conservatoire between 1967 and 1971, Murail was considered top of Messiaen's class. But his path towards becoming a composer was circuitous. When he enrolled at the Paris Conservatoire at the age of 20, he simultaneously enrolled at the prestigious Sciences Po to study political science; during this period he also took a degree in economics and a diploma in classical and Maghrebi Arabic (none of which, of course, was much use for a compositional career). Prior to entering the conservatoire, Murail was not a composer but an ondes martenot player, having studied the instrument with Jeanne Loriod at the city's Schola Cantorum; this interest in electronic sound would continue to be a mainstay of his work. A career break came in 1969 with a commission for a new work to be premiered in Le Havre (where he had spent his early youth) by Diego Masson's Ensemble Musique Vivante. The resulting work, *Couleur de mer* (1969), is remarkably prescient of elements of his mature style: a quasi-Symbolist title, autobiographical resonance, maritime imagery and a focus on colour.

Murail's main challenge was breaking free from serialist orthodoxy. As he recalled, 'There was a sort of peer pressure the students exercised among themselves' to compose in the serial idiom. Murail, though, was attracted by harmonic beauty; and when, drawing on the influence of Xenakis, he composed the breakthrough work *Altitude 8000* (1970) for small orchestra, it was booed by his fellow students at its January 1971 premiere. Nonetheless, Messiaen encouraged him to follow this new path. In the first year of Murail's Prix de Rome residency at the Villa Medici he met the enigmatic Giacinto Scelsi, whose radical music of sonorous flux was a revelation. In the second year he became friends with Grisey. The two began to



Tristan Murail is one of the most influential composers of the past 50 years

exchange ideas on the possibility of using the harmonic spectrum, periodicity and other psychoacoustic principles as ways of organising musical sound. Such ideas weren't new, having appeared here and there in Stockhausen and Ligeti, but they hadn't been concertedly explored before. This new impetus allowed Murail to compose his first mature works.

The works that followed had few peers for vision and excitement in 1970s new music. Among them were *Mémoire/Érosion* (1976) for ensemble; *Territoires de l'oubli* (1977) for piano; and *Treize couleurs du soleil couchant* (1978) for ensemble. Reformulating Messiaen's notion of colour and Scelsi's deconstruction of sound, these musical canvases achieved a clarity and richness comparable to the late 19th-century painting of Odilon Redon and Paul Gauguin. The material of these first-period works is based on the model of spectral resonance alongside signal processing models like frequency modulation (FM) synthesis, echo, phasing and reverberation. From the point of view of form, they tend to be through-composed. Accordingly, they often sound like

MURAIL FACTS

1947 Born March 11 in Le Havre; son of journalist, poet and painter Gérard Murail

1967-71 Student in Messiaen's composition class at the Paris Conservatoire

1969 First commission: *Couleur de mer* for Ensemble Musique Vivante

1971 Wins the Prix de Rome and begins two-year period at the Villa Medici

1973 Co-founds Ensemble l'itinéraire, subsequently winning a lucrative annual subvention from the French government

1975 Orchestral work *Sables* (1975), one of the first works in a tentative spectralist idiom, premiered at the Royan festival of new music

1980 *Gondwana* commissioned for the Darmstadt summer course, where Murail delivers the lecture 'The Revolution of Complex Sounds'

1983 Premiere of *Désintégrations* at IRCAM, where Murail also gives the first public lecture on spectral music

1986 CBSO and Simon Rattle premiere *Time and Again*

1991-97 Contributes at IRCAM to the development of the Patchwork computer programme, a compositional aid

1997-2010 Professor of Composition at Columbia University, New York

2013 BBC Symphony Orchestra premieres the first two parts of *Reflections/Reflets*

process music. In *Mémoire/Érosion*, Murail simulates the effect of an electronic echo unit applied to notes played by a horn. Each time the horn plays a note or figure, it echoes around the ensemble, at first in a simple way but gradually with chaotic, 'erosive' elements creeping in that tend towards noise. Murail initially calculated harmonies with a pocket calculator; by the time he was composing *Gondwana* he had bought a home computer.

In the 1980s Murail took advantage of the vast resources available at IRCAM, where he also taught. The first work composed at IRCAM was *Désintégrations* (1982) for ensemble and tape, commissioned by IRCAM and premiered by Ensemble Intercontemporain. Here the instrumental and electronic material are modelled on the same frequency material, which Murail in part generated from analyses of instrumental sounds. The first section, for instance, presents two aggregates (with fundamentals on A#0 and C#2) based on the spectral analysis of a low piano note (C1); the material based on each of these notes alternates before gradually converging, the eventual simultaneity of the two aggregates creating a complex, bell-like sonority. In 1980

and 1982 Murail lectured at Darmstadt, and at times the tenor of his comments on this compositional organisation is utopian: 'Frequency space is continuous and acoustical reality only has to define its own temperaments. If we push this reasoning to an extreme, the combination of pure frequencies could be used to explain all past categories of musical discourse and all future ones.' This spectralist harmony began to seem like a new system that could replace common-practice tonality. As Murail refined his compositional approach, international commissions came from the likes of Simon Rattle's City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (*Time and Again*, 1985).

A new period has been ongoing since the late 1990s. In works such as *Winter Fragments* (2000) for ensemble and electronics, the piano concerto *Le désenchantement du monde* (2012) and *Lachrymae* (2011) for alto flute and string quintet Murail has explored autobiographical allusions; melodic elements; a re-engagement with traditional forms; allusions to traditional music, literature and art; and a psychological

approach to form. One of the first works from this period is *Le partage des eaux* (1995) for orchestra. Its compositional process involved analysing the sound of waves breaking and tidal backwash. These maritime-themed spectral structures are orchestrated and, in a manner typical of Murail's music since *Désintégrations*, the acoustic instrumental textures are enriched with electronics (in the initial score, a Yamaha TX816). In his programme note, Murail relates the orchestral score to those of the late 19th and early 20th century, as a sort of update on that period's efforts towards maximal opulence (in this regard he cites Richard Strauss, Debussy and Ravel). More discreetly, the title of the work alludes to a key event from this time in Murail's life: the composer and his family's forthcoming emigration across the ocean from France to the USA, where Murail was to take up a position as Professor of Composition at Columbia University, New York.

Recently there have been cycles: *Portulan* (1998-2011) for chamber ensemble and *Reflections/Reflets* (2013-) for orchestra. Each contains multiple resonances, autobiographical ones chief among them. *Reflections/Reflets I – Spleen* adapts a setting of a Baudelaire poem by Murail aged 17; as well as this autobiographical content, and as well as being a 'symphonic poem' (Murail's term) on the Baudelaire (the different sections of the work reflect the different sections of the poem), *Reflections/Reflets I – Spleen* contains audible allusions to Debussy. The title, says Murail, is 'mostly about memory'; although, 'Here reflections means also reflets: reflections like in a mirror, when you see an image. But with a mirror it always distorts.' It's a testament to Murail's artistic brilliance that this most technical of compositional frameworks, spectralism, should continue to be channelled into such aesthetically rewarding areas. 6

SELECTED MURAIL RECORDINGS

Representing three distinct compositional periods



Mémoire/Érosion. Les courants de l'espace. Ethers. C'est un jardin secret, ma soeur, ma fiancée ...

Alain Noël *hn* Jeanne Loriod *ondes* Sylvie Altenburger *va* Ens l'itinéraire / Charles Bruck; Fr Nat Orch / Yves Prin et al Accord

On display here are breakthrough works that are refined and full of colour, representing the initial 1970s phase of spectral music whose first performers were Ensemble l'itinéraire (co-founded by Murail).



Le partage des eaux. Contes cruels. Sillages

Wiek Hijmans, Seth Josel *elec gtrs* BBC Symphony Orchestra; Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra / Pierre-André Valade Aeon (8/15)

Developing his compositional framework at IRCAM in the 1980s, Murail came to think of it as particularly apt for a new approach to orchestration. The fruit of this, *Le partage des eaux* is given a thrilling performance here.



Portulan

Ensemble Cairn / Guillaume Bourgogne Kairos

Murail's music since 2000 combines artistic allusions, revised engagement with traditional forms, and autobiography. A portulan (or portolan) is an ancient type of nautical map; it is also the name of a poetry collection by the composer's father.

Vocal



Alexandra Coghlan listens to choral works by Martin Bussey:

'Bussey explores thicker choral textures, filling out his arching, chant-infused melodies with cloudier added-note harmonies' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 75**



David Patrick Stearns hears a Russian album from Louise Alder:

'This recital taps into Alder's intelligence, remarkable linguistic range and emotionally vibrant instincts' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 84**

JS Bach

St John Passion, BWV245

Maximilian Schmitt *ten* Evangelist **Krešimir**

Stražanac *bass* Christus **Dorothee Miels** *sop*

Damien Guillon *countertenor* **Robin Tritschler** *ten*

Peter Kooij *bass* **Collegium Vocale Gent** /

Philippe Herreweghe

PHI © ② LPHO31 (107) • DDD • T/t)



Over the years Philippe Herreweghe has moved freely between the first

and second of Bach's *St John Passion* scores, composed for Leipzig Easters in 1724 and 1725. The main differences lie in Bach's jettisoning a number of arias in the second version and, most controversially, replacing the iconic opening movement with the chorale fantasia 'O Mensch, bewein', which the composer later redeployed to close Part 1 of the *St Matthew*.

How the choice of version affects the unfolding of the drama in Bach's most unvarnished oratorio is hard to gauge, though on the basis of Herreweghe's three recorded accounts – 1987, 2001 and this one – it's the first and most recent (both employing the original musical text) which seem the most convincing in the collective investment of the narrative. The start here is indeed ominously impressive, all of Collegium Vocale's collective experience yielding a palate of resonating imagery, rooted in portentous inevitability and prescient shards of light. Even in the most graphic *turba* (crowd) scenes, Herreweghe resists obvious projection for something which the listener can 'imagine' rather than just 'feel'.

If the aesthetic of this work seems especially suited to Herreweghe's madrigalian sensibilities, it becomes clear that there is no magic bullet to the distinctiveness and success of this performance. The command of integrated elements lies partly in its buoyant and unhurried pacing, but also in the mix of glowingly etched chorales (what textural

refinement!), arias presented as handsomely discrete 'scenas', gloriously varied *turbae* interpolations and illuminating storytelling by Maximilian Schmitt's Evangelist. The deft release of emotional adrenalin is evident in the arrival of 'Ach mein Sinn', after Peter's denial at the end of Part 1. It is quite overwhelming, especially in the heartfelt hands of Robin Tritschler.

Contributing to the discerning unity of vision and character of this performance is how the instruments sit embedded at the heart of the vocal sound. The presence of instrumental character provides a foil for the kind of vocal charisma which, if too prominent in this work, can wrong-foot a particular conceit. For instance, the blind discipleship of 'Ich folge', sung here winningly by Dorothee Miels, is given the kind of devotional innocence of a young prayer group, with the flute's closely argued and irradiating roulades, supported by a gently encouraging lute.

Peter Kooij sounds almost as evergreen as he did in 1987, and Damien Guillon's 'Es ist vollbracht' is simply exquisite. In an *embarras de richesses* of solo meditations, Miels's account of 'Zerfliesse' is a lament of supreme delicacy, hovering above gurgling reeds of their own mourning – a small selection of the wonders here. This is indeed one of the most thoughtful, affecting and powerful *St John Passions* in recent years. It reveals the mature mastery of Herreweghe at his most perspicacious and consistent, with Collegium Vocale Gent paving the way with gold.

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

Selected comparisons:

Herreweghe, r1987 (5/88) (HARM) HMC90 1264/5

Herreweghe, r2001 (12/01) (HARM) HMC90 1748/9

JS Bach

Magnificat, BWV243a. Cantata

No 63, Christen, ätztet diesen Tag

Hana Blažiková, Marie Perbost *sops* **Éva Začik** *mez*

Thomas Hobbs *ten* **Stephan MacLeod** *bass-bar*

La Chapelle Harmonique / **Valentin Tournet**

Château de Versailles Spectacles © CVS009

(59' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded live, December 22, 2018



Inspired by the splendour of the Royal Chapel at Versailles, the Château

Spectacles series of concerts and recordings adds the youthful La Chapelle Harmonique to its opulent catalogue with two vibrant performances of Bach's Yuletide masterpieces. Any project that opens with *Christen, ätztet* is truly throwing down the gauntlet and Valentin Tournet responds to the trickily resonant acoustic with a regal opening chorus, complemented by the two exquisite duets that define this pearl of a cantata from Bach's early years in Weimar. The balance between voices and instruments is about as ideal as you could imagine.

Yet what is most striking about this recording is how Tournet presents an identity for his ensemble: controlled – but not controlling – tempos lay the ground for unmannered shaping, poised and elongated vocal lines, and all assisted greatly by an 'orchestral' sound that is confidently full but never forced. If more experienced directors might explore greater rhetorical signposting (I think immediately of Raphaël Pichon and Pygmalion or the Ricercar Consort under Philippe Pierlot), Tournet tends to light the touch paper and gently position it at the heart of his glowingly cohesive group.

The *Magnificat* evolves naturally into a Marian canticle reading whose short movements very effectively reach forwards into one another. It's helped by adopting the first version, in E flat, with the four additional hymns ('laudes') for Bach's first Christmas Day in Leipzig in 1723. Set pieces such as 'Et misericordia' and 'Deposuit potentes' stand out with particular fervour and theatricality when preceded by these unadorned motets, whose seasonal melodies the congregation would have relished.



French song specialists: baritone Tassis Christoyannis and pianist Jeff Cohen have recorded the first complete set of Hahn's songs – see review on page 76

The solo singing is excellent. Hana Blažíková is perhaps not quite at her ringing best but alto Ěva Začik is a real find, with Thomas Hobbs and Stephan MacLeod unflinchingly impressive. As John Eliot Gardiner observes, the E flat version of the *Magnificat* reflects Bach at his most eager and idealistic, a man not yet blighted by run-ins with his bosses. If Gardiner's own reading is a testament to that, in all its fizzing spectacle, this latest account gives us another wonderful insight into arguably Bach's most radiant choral work.

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

Magnificat – selected comparison:
Gardiner (12/17) (SDG) SDG728

Bruckner

Requiem, WAB39. Aequales – No 1, WAB114; No 2, WAB149; after 'Vor Arneths Grab' (arr Cohrs). Am Grabe, WAB2. Libera me – WAB21; WAB22. Nachruf!, WAB81. Totenlieder – WAB47; WAB48. Vor Arneths Grab, WAB53

Johanna Winkel *sop* **Sophie Harmsen** *contr*
Michael Feyfar *ten* **Ludwig Mittelhammer** *bar*
RIAS Chamber Choir; Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin / Łukacs Borowicz

Accentus © ACC30474 (56' • DDD • T)
Recorded live at the Chamber Music Hall
of the Philharmonie, Berlin, November 2018



This collection of funeral music by Bruckner, mostly choral

works composed in his twenties, provides a fascinating contrast with the more commonly heard symphonic masterpieces from the composer's later years. The most substantial work here is the Requiem, completed in 1849 when Bruckner was just 24. Scored for four soloists, chorus, strings, three trombones, horn and organ continuo, the work was composed following the death of Franz Sailer, a notary at the St Florian monastery who had encouraged Bruckner's musical talents and who bequeathed him his Bösendorfer grand piano, which Bruckner kept for the rest of his life. The influence of Mozart notwithstanding, the Requiem is a finely crafted piece of music and is notable for including a double fugue six years before Bruckner commenced his extended counterpoint studies with Simon Sechter.

Also dating from Bruckner's early period are the *Aequales* Nos 1 and 2 for three trombones, the two *Libera me* settings

and the two lovely *Totenlieder* settings for a *cappella* choir. In addition to arranging the first *Aequales* for the more authentic historic trombone rather than modern bass trombone as usually heard, the Bruckner scholar Benjamin-Gunnar Cohrs has reconstructed a possible third *Aequales* in F minor that was later expanded to form the funeral chorus *Vor Arneths Grab*. This latter chorus was first performed in 1854 at the funeral of the prior of St Florian, Michael Arneth. The same text but different music forms the basis of another funeral chorus, *Am Grabe*, first performed in 1861. Bruckner composed a final funeral chorus, *Nachruf!* ('Obituary!'), in 1877 in memory of his friend and St Florian organist Josef Seiberl. A concert in 1886 brought a revised text and new title, *Trösterin Musik*. This recording of the piece combines both texts and titles with an arrangement by Cohrs for mixed choir rather than the large male choir for which it was originally composed.

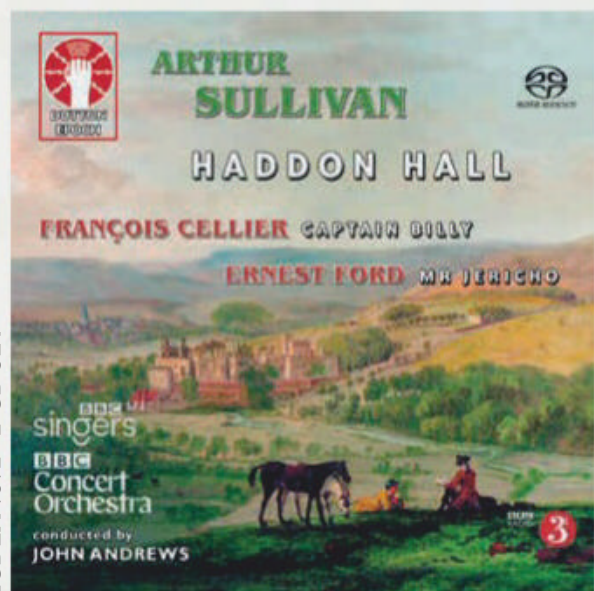
With Schönzeler's pioneering recording (Unicorn, 12/70) yet to be made available in digital form, Matthew Best's 1987 version for Hyperion has long been a recommendation for the Requiem. Borowicz's interpretation is considerably



DUTTON EPOCH NEW RELEASE



2CDLX 7372 • 2-CD SET



ARTHUR SULLIVAN **Haddon Hall**

This is the first professional recording of *Haddon Hall*, Arthur Sullivan's Light English Opera written with the librettist Sydney Grundy and produced at the Savoy in 1892, when Sullivan was at the peak of his powers. Based on the supposed elopement of Dorothy Vernon from Haddon

Hall with her lover John Manners, this opera is full of exquisitely crafted music, all marvellously orchestrated with Sullivan's consummate skill. Melodic beauty is expressed in such pieces as Lady Vernon's aria "Queen of the Roses" and the serene chorus "Time, the Avenger" which ends Act Two. Comic contrast is provided by a group of lugubrious Puritans and McCrankie, a character accompanied by Sullivan's remarkably accurate evocation of the bagpipes. The disc is augmented by two delightful "curtain-raisers," Ernest Ford's *Mr Jericho* (1893) and François Cellier's *Captain Billy* (1891), which in Victorian theatre were short works traditionally performed before or after the main piece on the programme.

**BBC CONCERT ORCHESTRA & BBC SINGERS
JOHN ANDREWS**

CDLX 7373



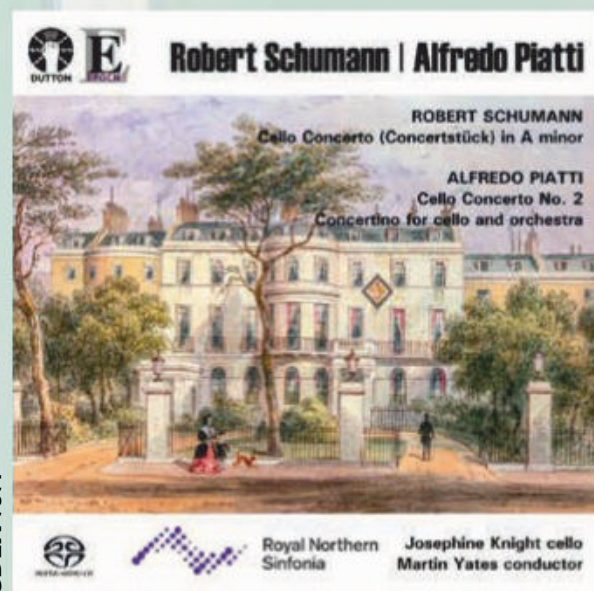
RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS & ARNOLD BAX

In this rewarding release, Vaughan Williams's Horn Sonata is revealed as a large-scale find. Conductor Martin Yates discovered the sketches for this piece in a small music notebook that is part of the VW manuscripts held in the

British Library. Having had the advantage of working from a complete solo part, Yates has reconstructed a memorable and enjoyable work, a highlight of which is the hauntingly lyrical second movement entitled "Romanza." The horn is again featured in VW's early Quintet in D major and the wartime *Household Music* in the version for horn and string quartet. Complementing these pieces is the world premiere recording of an unknown early composition by Bax – his one-movement Horn Sonata, characterised by its demanding piano writing and the horn's lyrical second subject.

**ROYAL NORTHERN SINFONIA CHAMBER ENSEMBLE
PETER FRANCOMB & VICTOR SANGIORGIO**

CDLX 7371



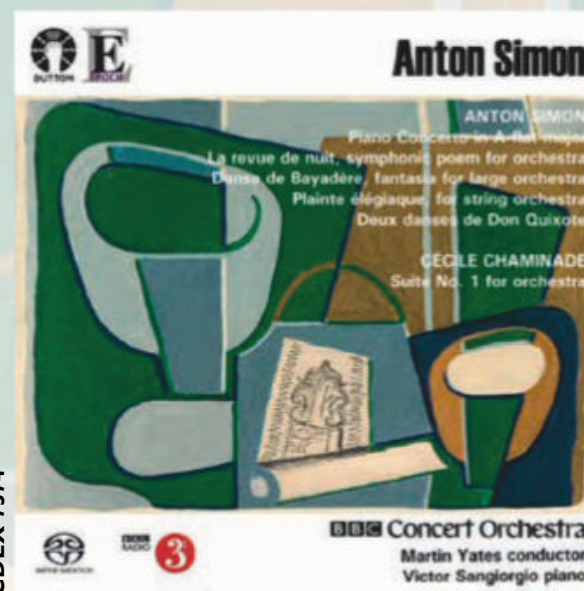
Robert Schumann & Alfredo Piatti

On this landmark disc, virtuoso cellist Josephine Knight teams up with Martin Yates and the Royal Northern Sinfonia in world premiere recordings of three nineteenth-century masterpieces. For the first time Schumann's Concertstück for cello and orchestra, the radical and powerfully expressive original version of his

Cello Concerto, emerges in all its pristine glory, in a brilliant performance of Knight's bold new text for Edition Peters, based on the fabled Kraków manuscript. This is coupled with two remarkable discoveries, the Concertino for cello and orchestra and the Cello Concerto No. 2 by Alfredo Piatti, arguably the greatest cellist of the nineteenth century. Both works combine supreme virtuosity with a rare melodic sensibility.

**ROYAL NORTHERN SINFONIA
JOSEPHINE KNIGHT & MARTIN YATES**

CDLX 7374



Anton Simon

Conductor, teacher and administrator, Paris-born Anton Simon (1850-1916) is a forgotten figure nowadays, but in the final decade of the nineteenth century he achieved some celebrity as an opera composer in his adopted home, Russia. His total output was relatively modest, the bulk of it comprised of orchestral and concert works including the

beguiling Piano Concerto and symphonic poem *La revue de nuit*. His most performed pieces, however, are the two Dances composed for a revival of Minkus' ballet *Don Quixote*. Completing the disc is the engaging First Orchestral Suite (1881) by Simon's younger compatriot, Cécile Chaminade (1857-1944).

**BBC CONCERT ORCHESTRA
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swifter than either of these but his performance has freshness and depth, and makes a strong impression. The smaller pieces have all been recorded before with the exception of the speculative third *Aequales*. The singing and playing are uniformly excellent, and the recording has exemplary balance and clarity. The booklet note by Cohrs, in German, English and French, is extremely informative. It's a pity, however, that no translations are provided of the Latin and German texts. **Christian Hoskins**

Requiem – selected comparison:

Corydon Sgrs, ECO, Best (1/88) (HYPE) CDA66245

Bussey

'In No Strange Land'

Balulalow. The Breaking of Bread. The Burning Babe. Children of Light. Christ is the morning star. Del Nacimiento. Desideratum. The Jesse Tree. Jesus, pro me perforatus. Three Motets. The Praises of St Francis. Que se llamaba Maria. Song of the Nuns of Chester. Swet Jesus. Where is this stupendous stranger. Whitsunday

Sonoro / Neil Ferris with **Michael Higgins** *org*

Resonus © RES10251 (70' • DDD • T)



Founded in 2016 by Neil Ferris and Michael Higgins, the chamber choir Sonoro

already have three recordings under their belt, including their intriguing debut 'Passion and Polyphony' (4/18), pairing music by Frank Martin and James MacMillan. Their focus on contemporary music continues with their latest album – a portrait of British composer Martin Bussey.

Bussey's career spans some 40 years and it's a shame not to get any real sense of chronology or development here in the composer's own rather haphazard booklet notes, which only intermittently date works that seem to come full circle from the 1980s and the elegant, angular simplicity of *Balulalow*, to 2011 and the translucent, melody-driven George Herbert setting *Whitsunday*.

In between we hear Bussey exploring thicker choral textures, filling out his arching, chant-infused melodies, always rhetorically responsive, with cloudier added-note harmonies. The rhapsodic words of St John of the Cross find rich echo in *Del Nacimiento* while Oscar Wilde's 'Ave Maria' burns fierce and hot, Bussey's shifting soundscapes catching the emotional currents of this charged lyric. Dance is a recurring feature, at its best in the joyful, generative rhythms of *The Jesse Tree* that trace spiritual growth: 'There shall come forth a shoot ...'.

Sonoro's 18 singers are full-voiced, drawn from opera as well as the choral world. This isn't a *Tenebrae* or a *Polyphony*, where blend is paramount, but an ensemble where individual voices push and urge and jostle. The effect is exciting – released, urgent, vibrant – but occasionally just a little scrappy in both pitch and ensemble. The pay-off comes in outstanding soloists: Greg Tassell's soaring tenor in *Desideratum*, the charged questions from Martha McLorinan's mezzo in the title-track, Tom Herford's Lieder-like freedom in *The Praises of St Francis*.

You wouldn't know these details of the soloists from the rather shoddily produced booklet, though, which fails to credit any of the singers. This is a recording that deserves better. **Alexandra Coghlan**

Colonna • Arresti

Arresti Sonata XVI **Colonna** Motetti

a due e tre voci, Op 3

Scherzi Musicali / Nicolas Achten *bar/theorbo*

Ricercar © RIC406 (59' • DDD • T/t)



Giovanni Battista Colonna (1637-95) trained in Rome with Carissimi and Benevoli

before returning home to Bologna, eventually becoming the long-serving *maestro di cappella* at San Petronio. Renowned as a master of both *stile antico* counterpoint and opulent large-scale polychoral *concertato* works, Colonna's adeptness at more intimate and virtuoso modern-style motets is proved here by seven diverse pieces for soloists and basso continuo selected from his *Motetti à due e tre voci*, Op 3 (1681). Marc Vanscheeuwijck's note suggests these might have been envisaged for Bologna's smaller churches, or perhaps the Oratorio dei Filippini, rather than the colossal space and reverberant acoustic of San Petronio.

Scherzi Musicali's rotating squad of five singers varies combinations in each intricately contrapuntal and expressively rhetorical motet, such as the limpid fluidity of the sopranos Wei-Lian Huang and Gwendoline Blondeel in the duets *Advocate fideles populi* and *Pulcra es* (which has a dazzling quick 'Alleluia' conclusion), joined by the baritone Nicholas Achten in the rapturous trio *Adeste superi*. The firmer-toned Griet De Geyter and gently ardent Achten navigate tricky fast divisions with assertive agility in *O splendida dies*. The countertenor Leandro Marziotte joins Achten and different sopranos in the vivacious trios *Salve pretiosum* and *Libano*

caeli. In addition to his compassionate vocal contributions, Achten directs sensuously from the theorbo. Continuo accompaniments are further enriched by another theorbo and an archlute (the different sizes, tunings and registers of all three plucked instruments are showcased in a sonata), five-string bass violin and an Italian three-stop chamber organ – also heard in Colonna's few extant solo organ pieces and a sonata by his assistant organist Giulio Cesare Arresti, played with suppleness by Mathieu Valfré. The revival of the fertile and innovative musical culture of 17th-century Bologna has lagged far behind the attention lavished on Venice, Rome and Naples – so this is an important landmark recording. **David Vickers**

Eisler

'Lieder, Vol 4'

Am Morgen. Dumpfe Trommel und beraushtes Gong. Im Frühling. Immer wieder nahst Du, Melancholie. Zwei Lieder. Sechs Lieder, Op 2. Lustige Ecke. Mädele, bind den Geissbock an. Die Mausfalle^a. Nachtgruss. Tanzlied der Rosetta. Der Tod. Totenopfer. Unter Feinden. Von der Langeweile. Was möchtest du nicht. Wenn der Tag vorbei. Zeitungsausschnitte

Holger Falk *bar*^a **Andreas Seidel** *vn*

Steffen Schleiermacher *pf*

Dabringhaus und Grimm © MDG613 2126-2 (69' • DDD • T)



The first three volumes of Holger Falk's Eisler series with Steffen

Schleiermacher (8/17, 1/18, A/18) ranged from 1929 to 1962, the year of the composer's death. Now the final volume returns us to his youth, covering his very first essays in a form in which he would prove so prolific: as Schleiermacher's detail-packed if somewhat erratically translated booklet essay puts it, 'Altogether, [Eisler] wrote almost 500 songs, so he might ... be one of the most important song composers of the 20th century.'

Either way, it's fascinating to hear where it all started, with the initially self-taught Eisler exploring various creative options (and reflecting the penchant for translations of Eastern poetry), before falling under the influence of the Second Viennese School and his teacher Schoenberg in his Op 2 and then deliberately breaking from literary conventions to set newspaper small ads in his 'Zeitungsausschnitte' of 1927.

What's remarkable is the conviction and honesty that underpin even these earliest

songs – and there are some gems. The album is topped and tailed by appealingly impish settings from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*. ‘Der Tod’ (1918) is sternly impressive, ‘Die Mausfalle’ charming, while the melody Eisler hits upon to portray bored whistling in ‘von der Langeweile’ is inspired, if that’s the right word for a song (possibly to Eisler’s own text) that describes a day with all the life of ‘a half-smoked cigarette’.

As before, there’s little to fault in Falk’s committed, imaginative singing or Schleiermacher’s vivid accompaniment. Over these four albums the pair have recorded more than 150 songs in what’s an important project. It’s just a shame that, as before, MDG fails to provide translations for the sung texts – a major drawback for non-German speakers. **Hugo Shirley**

Hahn

Complete Songs

Tassis Christoyannis bar **Jeff Cohen** pf

Bru Zane ™ ④ BZ2002 (4h 13’ • DDD • T/t)



Reynaldo Hahn’s reputation rests primarily on his songs, so it comes as

something of a shock to realise how few of them we hear on a regular basis. He wrote 107 in all, of which we are familiar with only a fraction, so Palazzetto Bru Zane’s new complete set, with their regular French song specialists Tassis Christoyannis and Jeff Cohen, consequently represents something of a journey of discovery that will inevitably lead to a much-needed reappraisal of his often remarkable achievement.

In 1913 Hahn lectured at the Université des Annales on the relationship between words and music in song, arguing that ‘beauty consists in a perfect union, an amalgam, a mysterious combination of the singing voice and the speaking voice, or to express it better, of melody and words’. He also added, however, that ‘if only one element were to dominate, it would unquestionably be the words; both common sense and artistic feeling decree this’. Sense always dictates sound in Hahn, resulting both in the fastidious way he teases out the meaning and emotional tone of his chosen texts and in his strikingly wide stylistic range. A pupil of Massenet, he is often described as post-Romantic, though from the late 1890s onwards Impressionism lurks behind his ambiguous harmonies, and the shifting pulses, spare piano figurations and

asymmetric melodies of *Études latines*, arguably his masterpiece, owe something to Satie’s *Gnossiennes*.

Taken as a whole, Hahn’s major cycles and collections constitute a remarkable disquisition on what his lover, Marcel Proust, called ‘les intermittences du cœur’. The erotic humour of the familiar *Venezia* (1901) contrasts sharply with the spent passions of the virtually unknown, and utterly astonishing, *Les feuilles blessées* of 1907, with its isolated protagonist wandering round a largely deserted Paris by night. *Chansons grises* (1893), from which the famous ‘L’heure exquise’ is often extracted, is a cycle of Verlaine settings of extraordinary sensuousness, which really needs to be heard complete, as do the *Rondels* of 1899, which link Renaissance and Romantic poetry in an elegant, ambivalent depiction of the optimism of youth and the wisdom of age. *Études latines* is breathtaking in its serene acceptance of the erratic nature of desire, but there’s real bitterness in the English-language *Love Without Wings* of 1899, in which the vocal line becomes increasingly fragmented as love turns sour.

Some, I suspect, might prefer the songs to be shared by more than one singer, though Christoyannis, in what is in many ways a tour de force, is for the most part exceptional throughout. Just occasionally the recording itself captures a pulse in his upper registers when under pressure, but otherwise everything is beautifully phrased, melody and text are held in well-nigh ideal balance and the prevailing mood is one of almost confessional intimacy. He sings *Venezia* with a glint of mocking irony in his voice which is utterly beguiling. *Les feuilles blessées* is very dark and moody, *Études latines* sounds really seductive and *Chansons grises* is exquisite in its understated rapture. As in their previous collaborations, Cohen is a wonderful foil, always knowing when to assert himself and when to hold back and let the vocal line do the work. Hahn’s piano-writing can often seem deceptively simple but there are lovely shifts in colour and dynamics throughout that carefully underscore the meaning of each song. It’s both a real treat and a fine set that immeasurably enhances our understanding of Hahn and his world. Do listen to it. **Tim Ashley**

Handel

Messiah, HWV56

Rachel Redmond sop **Damien Guillon** counterten

Nicholas Mulroy ten **Matthias Winckhler** bass

La Capella Reial de Catalunya; Le Concert des Nations / Jordi Savall

Alia Vox ™ ② AVSA9936 (144’ • DDD • T)
Recorded live at the Chapelle Royale, Château de Versailles, December 18 & 19, 2017



Jordi Savall’s claim that his performance of *Messiah* is based on Handel’s autograph

score in the British Library is puzzling because none of the obvious unique features evident only in the autograph and early versions are reinstated (such as the extra echoing bars in ‘Ev’ry valley’), whereas most alterations Handel made for his later revivals are adopted, as is customary in the majority of modern performances.

This concert, recorded live at Versailles, embraces Le Concert des Nations’ breadth of textured sonorities. Articulate string bowing, fulsome shaping and firmness of inner and bass parts provide crisply delineated support for Nicholas Mulroy’s immaculate *messia di voce* in ‘Comfort ye’ – and his melismatic flourishes and communicative words in ‘Ev’ry valley’ form a masterclass of intelligent Handel-singing. The assertive rushing strings for ‘the refiner’s fire’ give intense dramatic support to the expressive shapeliness and admirable embellishments of Damien Guillon, whose sensitive voice has momentary cracks in ‘O thou that tellest good tidings’ and seems more at home in the slow pathos of ‘He was despised’, even if its serenity is undermined by choppy string ritornellos.

The bucolic quality of the full-length Pifa is enhanced in its final section by warm oboes. A strangely sedate pace is adopted for ‘And suddenly there was with the angel’, whereas a very brisk ‘Rejoice greatly’ pits Rachel Redmond’s limpid brilliance against the thrilling momentum of the unison violins. ‘How beautiful are the feet’ and ‘I know that my redeemer liveth’ are sung gorgeously by Redmond in partnership with the full violin section led sweetly by Manfredo Kraemer. Matthias Winckhler’s precise declamatory eloquence shines in ‘Why do the nations’ (Savall’s steady pulse maximising harmonic tension in the strings) and an amiably regal ‘The trumpet shall sound’ (featuring brave ornamentation and Guy Ferber’s first-class natural trumpet-playing).

The 22-strong La Capella Reial de Catalunya’s balanced timbres and excited élan convey swaggering confidence, although there is also affecting subtlety in the harmonic shading of cadences in ‘Since by man came death’ and the unfolding fervour of the ‘Amen’ finale. A fraction



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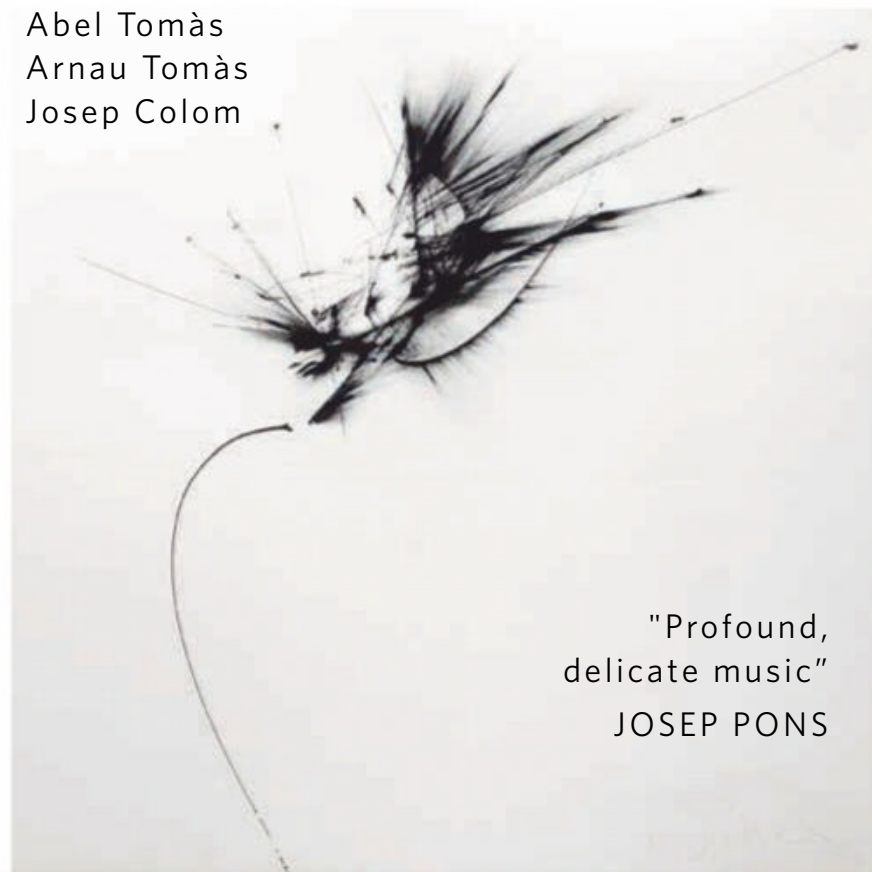
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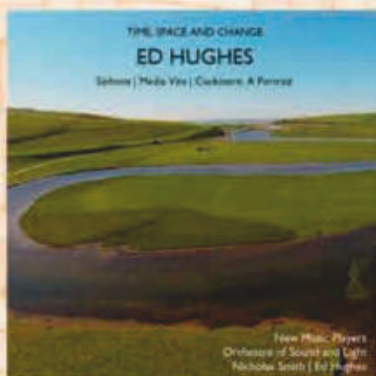


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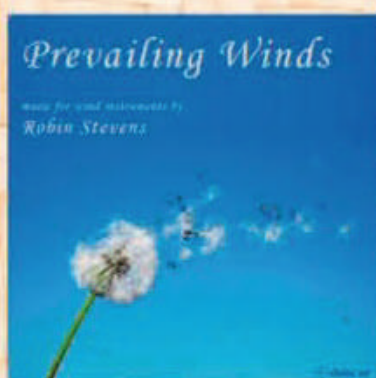


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more airiness and nuance in fugal expositions might have been useful from time to time. Trumpets in 'Glory to God' are not audibly in the distance (as Handel instructs), and exaggerated slowing-down at each iteration of 'and peace on earth' is an unconvincing mannerism – as are the questionable choral trills throughout 'Behold the lamb of God'. Nevertheless, elsewhere there is no-nonsense directness in choruses of gutsy resonance and emotive impact, and we do not wait long for upfront splendour in 'Hallelujah'. Offering orchestral vigour, an assured quartet of soloists (Redmond and Mulroy particularly classy), vivid choral grandeur and sure-footed theatrical pacing, this is an enjoyable all-rounder. **David Vickers**

Haydn

Missa Cellensis, HobXXII:5

Johanna Winkel *sop* Sophie Harmsen *contr*

Benjamin Bruns *ten* Wolf Matthias Friedrich *bass*

RIAS Chamber Choir; Akademie für Alte Musik

Berlin / Justin Doyle

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2300 (66' • DDD • T/t)



As so often with early(ish) Haydn, we can only speculate on the origins of

this expansive 'cantata Mass', composed in two separate stages between 1766 and 1773. But it's a fair guess that it was intended for a Viennese church associated with pilgrimages to Mariazell in the Styrian hills (*Missa Cellensis* literally means 'Mass of Zell'). Like Mozart in his unfinished C minor Mass, Haydn was evidently intent on displaying his mastery of a whole range of ecclesiastical styles and techniques, from the soberly archaic to (in, say, the soprano's jaunty 'Quoniam') the fashionably up-to-date. In his lifetime Haydn's Masses, early and late, were often criticised for their worldliness, even frivolity. Not so the *Missa Cellensis*, praised by the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* as 'indisputably the most serious, the purest and the most fitting to the Church' of Haydn's earlier Masses.

Justin Doyle and his accomplished period forces give a performance to rival the excellent version from Richard Hickox's Collegium Musicum 90. The choral singing is both incisive and mellifluous; tempos, balancing dignity and exuberance, are aptly chosen; and rhythms are always vital. While trumpets can be over-recessed, celebratory C major movements such as the *Kyrie* and 'Et vitam venturi' fugue, driving powerfully to its

climax, go with a terrific swing. Doyle is alive, too, to Haydn's moments of drama, as in the dissonant outbursts that invade the *stile antico* gravity of the 'Gratias'.

In the choral numbers there is little to choose between the two versions, both finely recorded, with a well-judged vocal-orchestral balance. Doyle's soloists, though, are a more variable bunch. Best is soprano Johanna Winkel, who sings her two arias with grace and an instrumental purity of timbre. Sophie Harmsen, whom I've admired in other music, lacks an ideal depth for the alto solos. Tenor Benjamin Bruns, familiar in Strauss and Wagner, fines down his tone effectively in the 'Et incarnatus est'. But both he and the bass (a lightish baritone with add-on low notes) never sound wholly at ease in their demanding solos, especially alongside Hickox's Mark Padmore and Stephen Varcoe. No one who buys this new disc is likely to be disappointed. But for me the deciding factor is the eloquence and expressive involvement of Hickox's solo team, topped by Susan Gritton's intense, musky soprano. **Richard Wigmore**

Selected comparison:

Collegium Musicum 90, Hickox

(9/01) (CHAN) CHAN0667 or CHAN0734

L Koželuch

Joseph der Menschheit Segen, PosK XIX:3^a.

Klage auf den Todt Marien Theresien,

PosK XIX:1^b. Mass, PosK XXV:1^c. Quaeso ad me

veni, sponse divine, PosK XXV:4^d. Umbra noctis orbem tangit, PosK XXV:5^e

abde **Simona Eisinger** *sop* ^a**Siegfried Gohritz** *spkr*

^e**Filip Dvořák** *hpd* ^{abc}**Czech Boys Choir Boni**

Pueri; Czech Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra,

Pardubice / Marek Štílec

Naxos © 8 573929 (68' • DDD • T/t)



The cantata *Joseph, Mankind's Blessing* was composed for use in one of Vienna's

Masonic lodges during a period of tolerance, before Joseph II himself 'rationalised' most such establishments out of existence in the middle of the 1780s. It might be thought then to have outlived its usefulness but Koželuch was pleased enough with it to issue a version with piano accompaniment, which is available to view online. After an orchestral introduction, choruses and soprano arias alternate with a trio of melodramas (delivered in German by Siegfried Gohritz), in which musical passages are halted for the next line of text to be declaimed – perhaps, at the first

performance(s), by the non-singing author of the text, Leopold Föderl.

Joseph is comparable with a handful of vocal works that Mozart provided for his lodge elsewhere in Vienna, although it's on a bigger scale, with nine movements taking over half an hour to perform. It's not as harmonically adventurous as Mozart and neither does it exploit the darker woodwind sounds that the Salzburger came to associate with Masonic themes. All the same, it's a work of some charm, and an interesting sidelight on the activities of a composer known primarily for his instrumental works.

The slightly breathy Czech boys' choir sound suitably devotional and patriotic here (if intonation falls a little short above the stave) and in a Mass that packs the whole long text into under 12 minutes of music, rather in the manner of some of Haydn's earliest Masses. The soprano Simona Eisinger is adequate both in the cantata and in a pair of sacred arias that avoid coloratura yet call for a wide tessitura and a good deal of stamina. She also provides welcome advocacy to what may be the true find among this collection, a setting for soprano and harpsichord of a lament on the death of Joseph's mother, the empress Maria Theresa. All together, a curio for those interested in the byways of music in Mozart's Vienna. **David Threasher**

Malloy

Octet (original cast recording)

Cast includes **Adam Bashian, Kim Blanck, Starr**

Busby, Alex Gibson, Justin Gregory Lopez,

JD Mollison, Margo Seibert and Kuhoo Verma

Nonesuch © 7559 79224-6 (79' • DDD • T)

Recorded live at The Romulus Linney Courtyard Theatre at The Pershing Square Signature Centre, New York, June 20-23, 2019



It will probably come as no surprise to anyone familiar with the weird and

wonderful work of Dave Malloy that this so-called 'Chamber Choir Musical' is an extraordinary confection. I listened to it on the same day as seeing the London premiere of his *Ghost Quartet*, a song-cycle about love, death and whiskey, and with other pieces of his at the back of my mind – his 'electropop' Broadway hit *Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812* and *Preludes*, his psychodrama on Rachmaninov's crisis of confidence – I felt like I was beginning to feel at home in his head. The musical language is grabby, inclusive and yet 'out there', and it screams

‘all round practitioner’ – performer, composer, orchestrator; his way with text is no less virtuoso – as brilliant and witty as it is obtuse. The work is, in a word, bonkers.

Octet is entirely *a cappella* and as such wholly appropriate to the confusion of voices and shape-shifting bedlam of the internet. It’s about our addiction to a technology with the power to bring us together as surely as to drive us apart. It’s about the affront to nature, human and otherwise, it’s about obsession, isolation, dependency, it’s about the fragile boundary between reality and fantasy. Like, swipe, refresh. Check status, email, updates.

What I love about Malloy’s concept here – and his texts are drawn from a heady mix of internet comment boards, scientific debates, religious texts and Sufi poetry – is that he cuts right back to the bare bones of our basic mode of communication: words. The distinction between spoken and sung is thrown into sharp relief as only music theatre can, and verbal and harmonic dexterity is where most if not all of the tension lies. It threatens to blow your mind as surely as the strident collision of voices out there in cyberspace.

Like most of Malloy’s work (and all musical theatre), there are ‘numbers’ and they behave like tracks on an album. There’s a funky (and funny) one called ‘Candy’ which brilliantly parodies the obsessive-compulsive nature (and potential disorder) of gaming. Tooth decay/mind decay. There’s a rather more sinister, even scarifying one, ‘Solo’, at the heart of the piece – a viciously funny swipe (is that left or right?) at online chatting/dating. There’s a Hymn, ‘Monster’ (no prizes for guessing what that is), and a hallucinatory number, ‘Little God’, which attempts to address the ‘black hole’ of technological advance. And yet in ‘Beautiful’ a glimmer of the positive is expressed with the idea that for some, relating to others ‘virtually’ can help them find ‘reality’ in themselves. *Octet* is bookended with the harmonic consonance of our relationship to the natural world in two hymns – ‘The Forest’ and ‘The Field’ (the latter a very human counterpoint) – and they are in themselves hopeful.

So I am left with the dichotomy of wanting to hear *Octet* again for clarity but resisting doing so because its beauty undoubtedly lies in its complexity and its impact in its unexpected ‘otherness’. To be perfectly honest I’m not entirely sure I want to hear it again – and I mean that as a compliment. It’s a one-off. I wish I’d experienced it live. But this is the next best thing: a live recording at the work’s premiere at Signature Theatre, New York. **Edward Seckerson**

Reicha

Requiem

Emőke Baráth *sop* **Markéta Cukrová** *contr*

Krystian Adam *ten* **Tomáš Šelc** *bass* **L’Armonia**

Vocale; L’Armonia Terrena / Zdeněk Klaua

Nibiru © 0116 2231 (56’ • DDD • T/t)



Reicha’s Requiem, composed in Vienna in the first decade of the 19th century, has been described as a link between the Requiems of Mozart and Berlioz. It’s true that Reicha may have heard Mozart’s late masterpiece in Vienna or seen the score following its publication in 1800; and it’s possible that he may have shown the work to his pupil Berlioz, although it’s not clear that it was ever performed during the composer’s lifetime.

Nevertheless, the influences in both directions are readily discernible: Reicha’s individual response to the text is innately dramatic and coloured with an artist’s palette of woodwind and brass sounds. Listen, for example, to the trumpet-bedecked sunrise that opens the ‘Tuba mirum’ or the almost operatic wind serenade that introduces the ‘Benedictus’ – a movement strongly reminiscent of the ‘Incarnatus’ from Mozart’s C minor Mass, K427, a work Reicha nevertheless almost certainly couldn’t have known. The falling-seventh figure that characterises the closing ‘Cum sanctis tuis’ fugue may also ring more than a vague bell.

A 1989 recording of the Requiem on Supraphon appears to be only sporadically available but this newcomer, from a smaller Czech independent label, easily supplants it. Zdeněk Klaua’s modern-instrument band displays a happier sonic blend in the generous acoustic of the Church of the Holy Saviour in Prague than Lubomír Mátl’s Dvořák CO, and he has managed to attract soloists of the calibre of Emőke Baráth and Krystian Adam to add lustre to what might otherwise appear a somewhat provincial project. Reicha’s reputation may never rise beyond that of a footnote in comparison to Mozart or his exact contemporary Beethoven but a work such as this demonstrates that he was capable of writing music of no little strength and individuality. **David Thresher**

Comparative version:

Dvořák CO, Mátl (SUPR) SU3859-2

R Strauss

Vier letzte Lieder^a. Mädchenblumen, Op 22^b.

Acht Lieder us Letzte Blätter, Op 10^b –

No 2, Nichts; No 3, Die Nacht; No 6, Die

Verschwiegenen; No 7, Die Zeitlose. Vier Lieder, Op 27^b – No 1, Ruhe, meine Seele; No 4, Morgen. Fünf Lieder, Op 39^b – No 1, Leises Lied; No 4, Befreit. Drei Lieder der Ophelia, Op 67 Nos 1-3^b. Du bist meine Auge, Op 37 No 4^b. Du meines Herzens Krönelein, Op 21 No 2^b. Einerlei, Op 69 No 3^b. Lob des Leidens, Op 15 No 3^b. Malven^b **Diana Damrau** *sop* ^b**Helmut Deutsch** *pf*^a **Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra / Mariss Jansons** Erato © 9029 53034-6 (73’ • DDD • T/t)



It’s nine years since Diana Damrau’s last album dedicated to Richard Strauss (3/11).

That release saw her in a selection of songs presented in orchestral versions (with Christian Thielemann and the Munich Philharmonic); on this new album she reaches the *Four Last Songs*, with Mariss Jansons at the helm of another Munich orchestra, coupling them with a cleverly chosen selection of songs with piano. ‘Morgen’, common to both albums, is an exception, appearing here in its famous orchestral guise too.

The German soprano’s virtues are well in evidence. There’s no doubting the integrity and intelligence of her performances, and there’s much to admire in her tidy, restrained way with the *Four Last Songs* – for which she receives sensitive, detailed accompaniment. There are things to enjoy in the other songs, too, not least in a suitably brittle, edgy account of the *Three Ophelia Songs*, with Helmut Deutsch’s piano-playing, here as throughout, exemplary.

There’s no shortage of tenderness elsewhere, either, even though her manner regularly feels more studied than easy. Compare Damrau’s ‘Malven’, for example, with Elsa Dreisig’s artless performance on her latest album, ‘Morgen’ (2/20). More fundamentally, though, I miss the vocal characteristics that Strauss at his most lyrical seems to cry out for.

Higher up in her range Damrau’s wings feel as though they are clipped, meaning that melodies are rarely able to soar. Where others can fill out phrases and flood them with warmth – Lise Davidsen comes to mind as a recent example in the *Four Last Songs* (Decca, 6/19) – Damrau is only able to offer extra steely force. Her vibrato tends now to get in the way of pure phrasing, such as at the very close of ‘Befreit’.

Damrau’s many fans are unlikely to be disappointed, but other singers unleash the full lyricism and beauty of this music more potently and movingly. **Hugo Shirley**



Evensong for Ash Wednesday: a no-frills service from The Choir of St John's College, Cambridge and their Director of Music Andrew Nethsingha

'Ash Wednesday'

Allegri Miserere mei, Deus **JS Bach** Prelude, BWV548 **Byrd** Ne irascaris, Domine. Preces and Responses **Weelkes** The Short Service
The Choir of St John's College, Cambridge / Andrew Nethsingha
 with **James Anderson-Besant** *org*
 Signum © SIGCD605 (53' • DDD • T/t)
 Recorded live, March 6, 2019



There is a lot more 'Evensong Live' here than on the recent disc bearing that name from King's College, Cambridge (1/20). Here we have a straight document of the 2019 Ash Wednesday service from the chapel of St John's College, the same event broadcast on BBC Radio 3 but this one captured and mixed in-house. There's no funny business – no welcome, no introit, no hymn – and the organ doesn't sound until the voluntary: an embracing, solemn account of Bach's Prelude in E minor, BWV548.

All of which conveys the atmosphere of the day and the marking of it at this address. We hear 'a record of a unique event' for Andrew Nethsingha, who

acknowledges imperfections (not that there are many) and draws attention charmingly to a moment of crisis management from the 13-year-old soloist in Allegri's *Miserere*. That's life and that's liturgy. The Allegri, and most things here, draw attention away from musicality and towards something else, however strong the musicality in play. Some of the best moments are in Byrd's Preces and Responses. There are deeper reasons why but to cite chapter and verse, try the final 'Amen': given a distinctive shape, but all about the weight of a conclusion and not about the notes, despite the curvaceous beauty (even the tenor false relation is downplayed).

Elsewhere, there's everything you'd expect from this choir. Byrd's *Ne irascaris, Domine* demonstrates a take on the polyphony's line and weave but avoids momentary *Affekt* (though the dwelling on 'Sion deserta facta est' gets a little close). The malleable, sensitive trebles have what seems to me an unparalleled ability to invest text and phrase with meaning without focus-pulling, which is a decent description of the choir's whole approach.

One piece features on both this and the King's release: the *Magnificat* from Weelkes's *Short Service*. You can enjoy comparing two accounts from the current

vintage of these two neighbouring choirs – John's mostly about blend and text, King's about rhythmic bounce and top-line brightness – but that's not the point. This release conveys an experience in a place, a moment in time. Yet it also puts a price on something available free online, where there are dozens more like it (sjcchoir.co.uk/listen/webcasts). **Andrew Mellor**

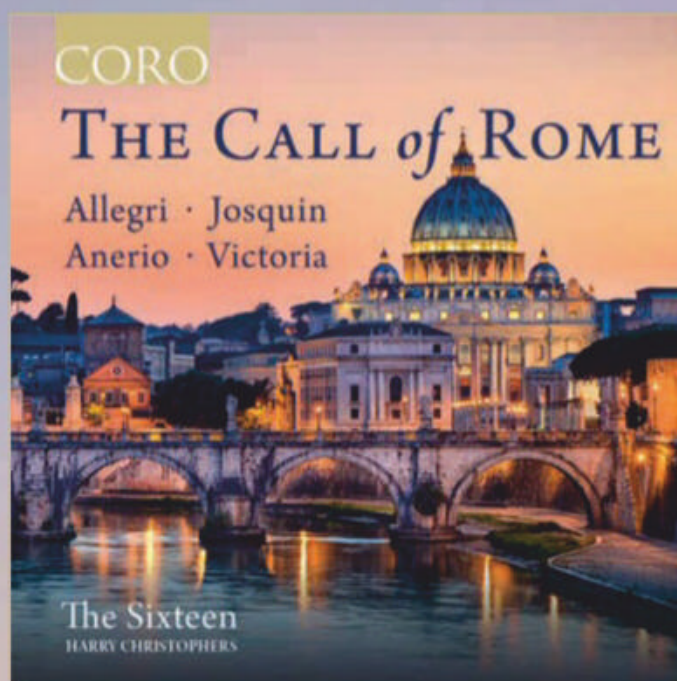
'The Divine Muse'

Haydn Arianna a Naxos, HobXXVlb:2. Geistliches Lied, HobXXVI:17 **Schubert** Ganymed, D544. Die Götter Griechenlands, D677. Gott im Frühlinge, D448. Marie, D658. Son fra l'onde, D78. Vedi, quanto adoro, D510 **Wolf** Alte Weisen – No 6, Wie glänzt der helle Mond. Goethe Lieder – No 50, Ganymed. Mörike Lieder – No 22, Seufzer; No 23, Auf ein altes Bild; No 25, Schlafendes Jesuskind; No 27, Zum neuen Jahr; No 28, Gebet; No 46, Gesang Weylas. Spanisches Liederbuch – No 4, Die ihr schwebet
Mary Bevan *sop* **Joseph Middleton** *pf*
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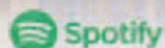
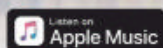


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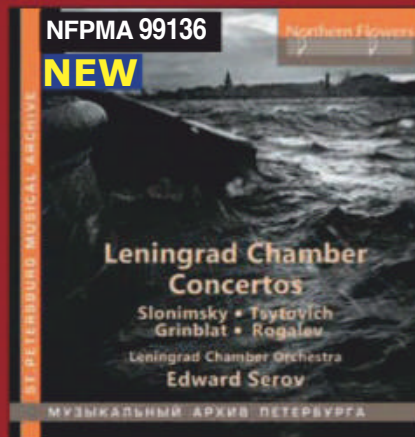
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whether performing on the operatic stage or on the recital platform. Those dramatic qualities – and her keen care for diction – shine in her latest album, ‘The Divine Muse’, with pianist Joseph Middleton. The idea for the programme was drawn from Middleton’s desire to tap into Bevan’s interest in mythology and the history of religion, focusing on people who lived ‘within the spheres of myth and divinity’. The Virgin Mary looms large, along with characters from Classical mythology in works by Schubert, Wolf and Haydn.

There is plenty of drama in two of Schubert’s Metastasio settings, ‘Vedi, quanto adoro’ and ‘Son fra l’onde’, Bevan imbuing her performance with operatic fervour. There’s drama too in Haydn’s brilliant scena *Arianna a Naxos*, especially the despair and anger in Ariadne’s abandonment by Theseus. It is more difficult to let rip in the version with piano accompaniment than with orchestra (this album was released on the same day as Kate Lindsey’s new disc with Arcangelo, which includes *Arianna* – Alpha, 2/20), but Bevan nevertheless builds a strong sense of character, particularly in the final aria, ‘Ah, che morir vorrei’.

They include two settings of Goethe’s ‘Ganymed’, contrasting the intense yearning of Wolf’s against Schubert’s happier, more contented Lied. Bevan is very good at colouring notes beautifully – ‘Die Götter Griechenlands’ is tremendous – and floats her top exquisitely in Schubert’s ‘Marie’. She is at her best in the sprinkling of Wolf’s *Mörike Lieder*, including an ecstatic ‘Gebet’. Middleton’s playing is always sensitive, never overwhelming the singer.

Richard Stokes’s booklet notes are exemplary, scholarly but always accessible, such as his explanation of the dissonance in ‘Auf ein altes Bild’ where Mörike, contemplating a painting of the Virgin Mary and Child in pastoral landscape, notes that also in that forest grows the tree which will provide the wood for Christ’s cross.

Mark Pullinger

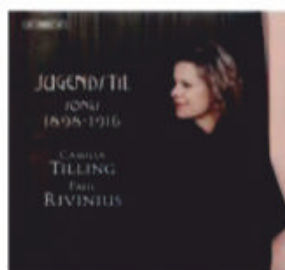
‘Jugendstil’

‘Songs 1898-1916’

Berg Sieben frühe Lieder **Korngold** Einfache Lieder, Op 9 – No 1, Schneeglöckchen; No 3, Das Ständchen; No 4, Liebesbriefchen; No 6, Sommer. Glückwunsch, Op 38 No 1 **Mahler** Rückert Lieder **Schoenberg** Vier Lieder, Op 2 **Zemlinsky** Walzer-Gesänge, Op 6

Camilla Tilling sop **Paul Rivinius** pf

BIS © BIS2414 (66’ • DDD/DSD • T/t)



Like so many terms borrowed from the other arts, *Jugendstil* is not easy to

pinpoint in music. This recital from Camilla Tilling and Paul Rivinius could also, then, simply be called ‘Vienna: fin de siècle’, had not Barbara Hannigan already used it for her similar programme (Alpha, 12/18). Tilling’s programme similarly features the delicate, highly perfumed chromaticisms of Schoenberg’s Op 2 and Berg’s *Seven Early Songs*. She represents Zemlinsky with his rarely heard Op 6 and adds in Korngold (his lovely ‘Glückwunsch’ of 1948, the only song to take us out of an otherwise concentrated time period).

While Hannigan plumped for Alma Mahler, here we have Gustav: Tilling concludes with the *Rückert Lieder*, and they find her at her very best. It’s difficult to resist the purity of her sound, the loveliness of her pearly, bright tone, especially in the first three songs (as ordered here). She is impressively sturdy and unflinching in ‘Um Mitternacht’, too, while for ‘Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen’ she and Rivinius are joined by the violinist Nicola Birkhan in an arrangement ‘devised by the performers’ after the orchestral version. The performance itself can’t be faulted for sensitivity, but three feels to me like a bit of a crowd in this configuration.

There’s a great deal to enjoy in the rest of the programme, with Tilling bringing beguiling tone and unfailing musicality to some intoxicating songs, generally favouring a more conventional, less minxy approach than Hannigan. Rivinius is reliably superb in the often knotty, overwrought piano-writing. Away from the familiar Mahler, though, the soprano’s German is often indistinct and lacking in definition, with specifics sacrificed to general polish. Otherwise, though, this rewarding programme is beautifully performed and recorded. **Hugo Shirley**

‘Liederkreis’

‘Decades – A Century of Song, Vol 4: 1840-1850’

Dargomizhsky Confession. I am sad. Night breeze. Sixteen years old **Donizetti** Una lacrima (Pregiera). Il sospiro **Franck** Aimer. L’Émir de Bengador. Souvenance. Le sylphe **Gjer** Natthimelen, Op 6 No 2 **Josephson** Serenad, Op 8 **Lindblad** Aftonen. En sommerdag **Mendelssohn** Altdeutsches Frühlingslied, Op 86 No 6. Nachtlid, Op 71 No 6. Venetianisches Gondellied, Op 57 No 5. Warnung vor dem Rhein, WoO16 **Schumann** Liederkreis, Op 24

Anush Hovhannisyan sop **Ida Evelina Ränzlöv** mez
Nick Pritchard, Oliver Johnston tens **Florian Boesch, Alexey Gusev, Samuel Hasselhorn** bar
Malcolm Martineau pf

Vivat © VIVAT119 (72’ • DDD • T/t)



Schumann’s bittersweet Heine cycle of love frustrated and love betrayed

heads the billing here. But as in earlier volumes of Malcolm Martineau’s decade-by-decade journey, the range is wide and unpredictable: from the songs Dargomizhsky wrote for his St Petersburg students, via little-known mélodies by César Franck, to gentle lyrics by Adolf Lindblad once popularised by Jenny Lind. If mellifluous grace rules, all the songs, many of them virtually unknown, give pleasure. Martineau’s singers have fresh, youthful voices and care for their words, while his own playing, not least in the Schumann, is as sensitively weighted and coloured as ever.

With her darkly sensuous timbre, Anush Hovhannisyan is a vivid advocate for Dargomizhsky, whether in the seductive playfulness of ‘Night breeze’ or the faintly risqué innocence of ‘Sixteen years old’. In an all-too-brief appearance, the baritone Alexey Gusev relishes the comic brio of Dargomizhsky’s ‘Confession’, in which a man becomes besotted by his own female double. Dargomizhsky’s songs, like Tchaikovsky’s after him, belong to the French salon romance tradition represented by four attractive, Gounodesque mélodies by César Franck. Nick Pritchard’s dulcet lyric tenor and shapely phrasing are just what is needed here, whether in the nostalgic ‘Souvenance’ or the diaphonous, shimmering ‘Le sylphe’.

Oliver Johnston is aptly ardent, if less than perfectly even, in the amorous grieving of two Donizetti songs. And the pellucid-toned Ida Evelina Ränzlöv – a lovely singer – brings tenderness and unselfconscious charm to three Lindblad songs, above all the beguiling ‘En sommardag’. Samuel Hasselhorn lacks a true legato in Mendelssohn’s fervent ‘Nachtlid’ and rather misses the nocturnal secrecy of ‘Venetianisches Gondellied’, but his healthy baritone is well displayed in the sturdy, rustic march of ‘Warnung vor dem Rhein’, where a father warns his son against the dangerous lure of women, symbolised by the Lorelei.

You’ll listen in vain for a smooth, ‘bound’ line, too, in Florian Boesch’s idiosyncratic performance of Schumann’s Op 24

Liederkreis. Heine's persona, as refracted through Schumann's music, here veers between trance-like introspection and desultory protest. Much of the cycle unfolds in a confiding, half-whispered speech-song, with phrases trailing off distractedly. If you want Schumann's lyric melodies given full value, look elsewhere. Yet in close partnership with Martineau, Boesch's haunted, disturbed reading is oddly mesmerising. Any collector of this revelatory series is going to want this new disc, whose attractions, as before, are enhanced by superb, wide-ranging notes from Susan Youens.

Richard Wigmore

'Lines Written During a Sleepless Night'

'The Russian Connection'

Britten *The Poet's Echo*, Op 76 **Grieg** *Six Songs*, Op 48 **Medtner** *Mailed*, Op 6 No 2. *Meeresstille*, Op 15 No 7 **Rachmaninov** *Six Songs*, Op 38 **Sibelius** *Five Songs*, Op 37 - No 4, *Was it a dream?*; No 5, *The Maiden*. *Sigh, sedges, sigh*, Op 36 No 4. *Spring is flying*, Op 13 No 4 **Tchaikovsky** *Six Mélodies*, Op 65

Louise Alder *sop* Joseph Middleton *pf*
Chandos © CHAN20153 (74' • DDD • T/t)



Louise Alder's recording presence moves into a considerably higher

gear with this release – not her first recital disc but one distinctively curated to further tap into her intelligence, remarkable linguistic range and emotionally vibrant instincts (while mostly avoiding the long shadows of singers who came before her in this music). Alder's Ukrainian heritage is the most obvious explanation for how this 34-year-old British winner of the 2017 BBC Cardiff Singer of the World competition achieves a seamless emotional identification with the text and music for Rachmaninov's Op 38 songs that begin this disc. Good news for listeners who are allergic to the metallic edge heard in some Russian voices is that Alder's sound is more post-Kiri Te Kanawa – one reason she has also enjoyed success in the title-roles of Handel's *Theodora* and Cavalli's *La Calisto*, as well as Richard Strauss in her single-composer recital (Orchid Classics, 9/17). Alder's tone hasn't the immediately identifiable voice print of, say, Elisabeth Söderström's Rachmaninov recordings (Decca) but the mind behind the voice expresses itself with exceptional precision and commitment, without short cuts or mannerisms.

The sequencing of the music is consciously fashioned as a journey. One compass is her family history – starting with the purely Russian music of Rachmaninov and ending with the Russian/British fusion of Britten's *The Poet's Echo* (with its mostly Pushkin texts). On a purely musical level, the disc is a well-selected tour of late Romantics with certain recurring themes. Composers are often represented by songs with ballad-like narratives, and Alder has the vocal colour and sense of theatrical through-line to make such pieces all that they can be. The avian imagery in Grieg's 'The Nightingale's Secret', for example, is sung for all its expressive potential – as opposed to its novelty. Some may miss the vocal gravity of the classic Kirsten Flagstad recording of Sibelius's 'The Maiden' but that's an unfair measuring stick, and the song about a girl coming home from meeting her lover is among the more welcome items on the disc. Songs about dreams – with all of their fantasy and symbolic power – surface periodically, with Alder summoning some of her warmest tone and most winning manner. The French-language Tchaikovsky songs seem shallow by that composer's standards but they create some breathing space before moving on to the Britten cycle.

The opening song of *The Poet's Echo* is one of Britten's most arresting. But the vocal lines that test Alder's limits are those clearly tailored to the specific capabilities of its dedicatee, Galina Vishnevskaya, though her own recording (Decca, 6/70) hasn't worn so well for vocal and sound-quality reasons. Still, Alder is quite credible in the piece, which brings the disc to the sort of substantial conclusion that makes you want to return to it soon. I wish pianist Joseph Middleton was more vividly recorded. I also wish the Rachmaninov and Britten song texts weren't printed in Cyrillic in the booklet. Perhaps Alder went down the rabbit hole momentarily: the cover photo has her posed identically to one of her ancestor photos on the inside pages. A bit eerie? Like Kim Novak's character in the Alfred Hitchcock film *Vertigo*?

David Patrick Stearns

'Passions'

'Venezia 1600-1750'

Caldara *Crucifixus a 16* **Cavalli** *Salve regina* **G Gabrieli** *Exaudi me Domine* **Legrenzi** *Sonata*, Op 10 No 6 a 4 - *Adagio*. *Dialogo delle due Marie* **Lotti** *Crucifixus a 6*. *Crucifixus a 8*. *Crucifixus a 10*. *In una siepe ombrosa* **Marini** *Balletto secondo* *Pretirata*. *Sinfonia sesto tuono* **Merula** *Hor ch'è tempo di dormire* **Monteverdi**

Adoramus te Christe. *Ballo delle ingrato* - *Entrata*. *Orfeo* - *Sinfonia*. *Selva morale e spirituale* - *Cantate Domino*; *Chi vol che m'innamori (exc)*; *Crucifixus a 4*; *È questa vita un lampo*

Les Cris de Paris / Geoffroy Jourdain

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2632 (75' • DDD • T/t)



Passions moved, passions shared, and the Passion of Christ on the Cross. This

programme, a seemingly disparate selection of early Baroque Venetian works punctuated by five settings of the *Crucifixus*, looks like it shouldn't work, yet in the hands of the musicologist and conductor Geoffroy Jourdain it is both compelling and rewarding. The second Harmonia Mundi album from Les Cris de Paris is so much more than a selection box: it blends 'transcendentally inspired secular music and sacred music embodied in theatrical fashion', exploring commonality between sacred and secular genres.

The disc opens with Tarquinio Merula's *Hor ch'è tempo di dormire*, a lullaby for the baby Jesus which darkly foretells his fate. This mesmeric ninnananna wields a power beyond its simple, swaying two-note accompaniment and is sung with a foreboding passion by the soprano Michiko Takahashi, more dramatic but less dark than Montserrat Figueras (Alia Vox). This melts into Monteverdi's *Crucifixus a 4*, where delicate descending lines are instantly recognisable emblems of lamenting.

The *Crucifixus* settings are the highlight of this album and Antonio Lotti's *Crucifixus a 10* is a particular standout. Readers will know this from Andrew Parrott's searingly beautiful recording (Virgin/Erato) but Jourdain's new performance rivals this for sheer dramatic impact. Whereas Parrott shone a spotlight on the sequence of mouth-watering suspensions in the upper voices, Jourdain undercuts this texture with a menacing continuo team whose percussive strumming evokes the nails on the Cross and provides a springboard for the voices to decry 'passus et sepultus est' (suffered and was buried) to devastating effect. Or perhaps Jourdain's genius here was to follow it with the *Entrata* to Monteverdi's *Ballo delle ingrato*. Strange bedfellows in theory but a superb transition in practice. This disc is a fine evocation of Baroque passions in every sense and one that keeps giving beyond the first few hearings. Absolutely not to be missed.

Edward Breen



The soprano Louise Alder, with pianist Joseph Middleton, identifies with different emotional states in a distinctive Russian album

'Une soirée chez Berlioz'

Berlioz *La captive*, Op 12. *La damnation de Faust*, Op 24 – *Danse des sylphes*. *Élégie en prose*, Op 2 No 9. *Fleuve du Tage*. *Harold en Italie*, Op 16 – *Marche des pèlerins*. *Le jeune pâtre breton*, Op 13 No 4 **Dalayrac** Ô! ma Georgette. Rien, tendre amour, ne résiste à tes armes. *Romance de Nina* **Della-Maria** Ah! pour l'amant le plus discret. Que d'établissements nouveaux **Devienne** Vous qui loin d'une amante **Lélu** Viens, aurore **Liszt** L'idée fixe, S395 **JPA Martini** Plaisir d'amour **Meissonnier** Quatrième rondo pour lyre ou guitare. Le sentiment d'amour **Plantade** Bocage que l'aurore **Zani de Ferrante** Le désir. Les regrets

Stéphanie d'Oustrac *mez* **Thibaut Roussel** *gtr*
Tanguy de Williencourt *pf* with **Lionel Renoux** *hn*
Bruno Philippe *vc* **Caroline Lieby** *hp*
 Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2504 (65' • DDD • T/t)



The very linking of Berlioz and the guitar still sounds like an improbable answer to a fantasy quiz question. Was it really one of the future radical orchestrator's principal

instrument of reference? Did he actually play it, and how competent was he?

The cover of the booklet – which should have been the photo on the CD's jewel case – connects us immediately with the history, showing the actual guitar, autographed both by Berlioz and Paganini (who gave it to him), which Thibaut Roussel plays here. The instrument leads this new release where the three named soloists are joined occasionally by harp, cello and natural horn (from the same period, around 1830) in a programme of their own devising. This is based on the intimate musical evenings in which Berlioz is known to have participated as a performer on the guitar, either earlier in his life with his family in the country at La Côte-Saint-André or later in Paris with friends such as Eugène Sue and Ernest Legouvé. The latter recalled how they accompanied themselves in a piano-less apartment: 'Luckily we had one triumphant resource, the guitar. The guitar encapsulated for Berlioz all the instruments, and he did play it very well. He took it and began to sing.'

The repertoire comprises arrangements of songs and incidental music by Berlioz

and contemporary friends and colleagues, featuring nine items from an 1819-22 *Recueil de Romances avec accompagnements de guitare par M (Berlioz)*. So, from the hand of Berlioz himself, just these arrangements but no original guitar music. However, of note also – but for piano, not guitar – are numbers from Berlioz's own *La damnation de Faust* and *Harold en Italie*, Liszt's arrangement of 'L'idée fixe' from the *Symphonie fantastique*, three vocal items by Nicholas Dalayrac (whom the young Berlioz especially admired and was influenced by) and the opening Martini 'Plaisir d'amour'.

The old instruments sound well in Harmonia Mundi's recording, made at the Philharmonie de Paris (which did much to support the project). Stéphanie d'Oustrac brings style and sympathy to the texts without swamping the chamber atmosphere and Tanguy de Williencourt has quite some finale to the disc with Liszt's arrangement of the Pilgrims' March from *Harold en Italie*. It makes for both an attractive programme to hear and a peep at a side of Berlioz normally left to rumour.

Mike Ashman

WHAT NEXT?

Do you have a favourite piece of music and want to explore further? Our monthly feature suggests some musical journeys that venture beyond the most familiar works, with some recommended versions. This month, **Hugo Shirley**'s point of departure is ...

Schumann's *Dichterliebe* (1840)

Schumann's *Dichterliebe*, Op 48, setting poems from Heinrich Heine's *Lyrisches Intermezzo* (originally published in 1823, reappearing in 1827 as part of *Buch der Lieder*), is one of the best-known products of his miraculous *Liederjahr*. It's a quintessential work of musical Romanticism, a perfectly formed cycle of 16 songs – some of them strikingly aphoristic – charting love from all the many angles that Schumann himself had experienced in his own wooing of Clara Wieck. By turns lyrical, longing, passionate and bitter, it reflects the multiple layers of Heine's poetry, if not perhaps its ever-present irony. Christoph Prégardien's new recording, featuring superb accompaniment from Michael Gees, goes further than many in capturing all the cycle's complexity.

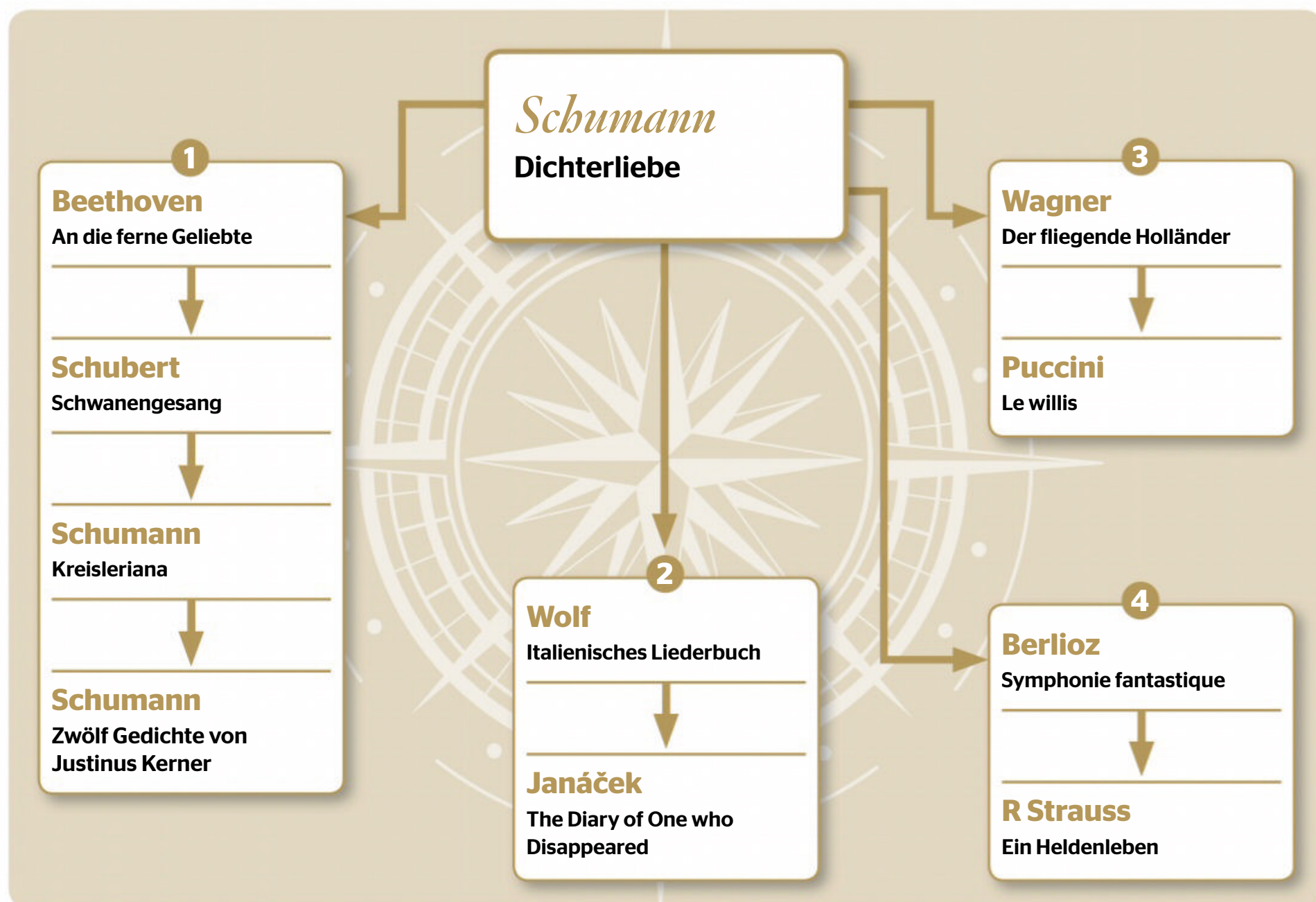
● Christoph Prégardien *ten* Michael Gees *pf* (Challenge Classics, 2/20)

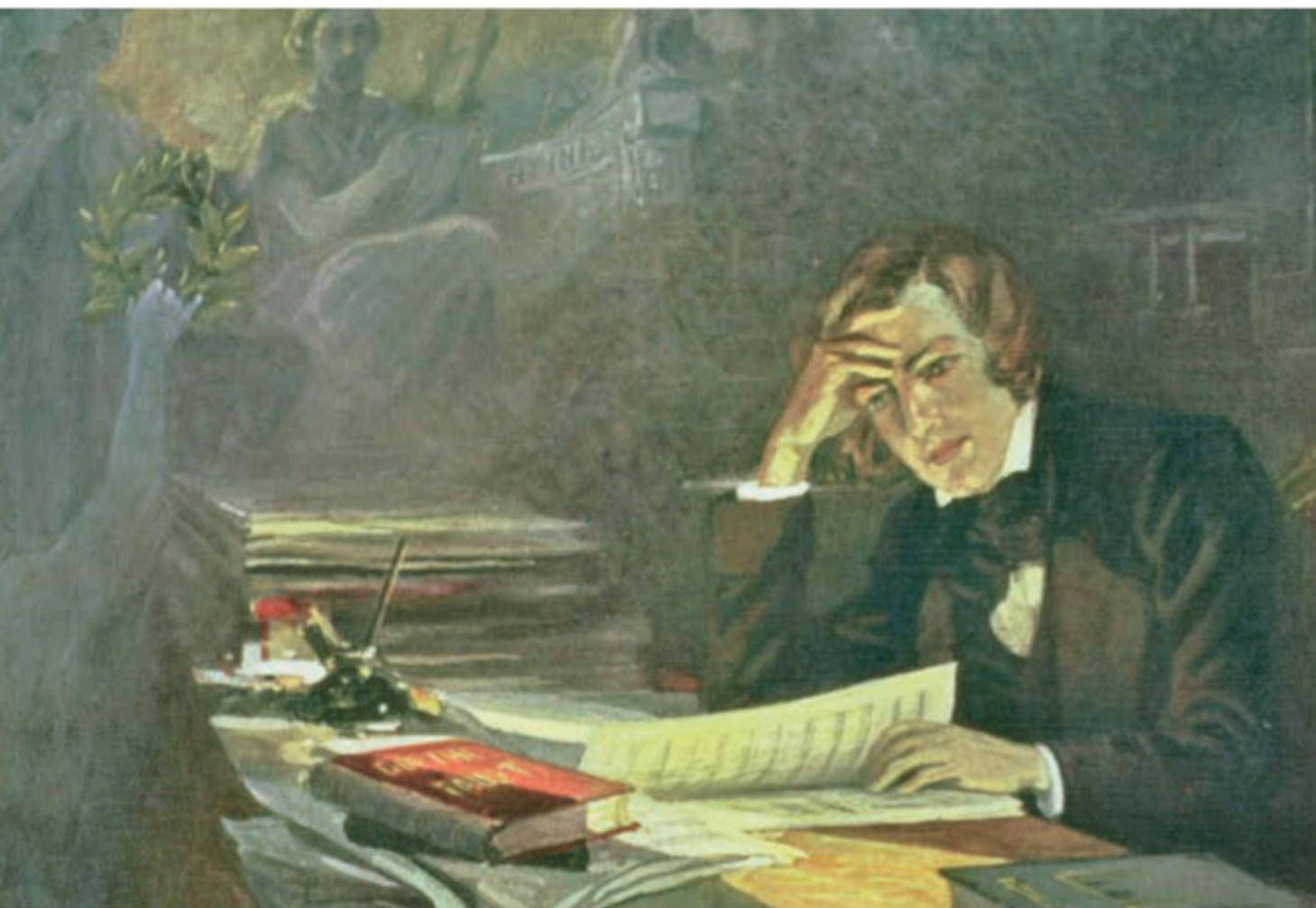
1 Precursors

Beethoven *An die ferne Geliebte* (1816) Beethoven's setting of verse by the young physician Alois Isidor Jeitteles is a remarkable precursor of song-cycles by Schubert, as well as Schumann (who quoted from it in 1836 in his Op 17 *Fantasie* for solo piano). One song runs into the next to create a quasi-through-composed whole. Who – and, indeed, where – the distant beloved was remains a subject of debate and speculation, but the songs are a moving expression of tender longing and emotion.

● Wolfgang Holzmair *bar* Imogen Cooper *pf* (Philips, 6/00)

Schubert *Schwanengesang* (1828) It's not a true cycle (unlike *Die schöne Müllerin* and *Winterreise*), but Schubert's *Schwanengesang*, published posthumously, features six consecutive Heine settings



Schumann composing his song cycle, *Dichterliebe*

in its second half. They run the gamut from frustration and despair to ... well, even greater despair (in the shockingly modern 'Der Doppelgänger'). They constitute arguably some of the greatest songs ever written and are among the first of many masterpieces of song to be inspired by the poet.

● Thomas Quasthoff *bar* Justus Zeyen *pf* (DG, 8/01)

Schumann Kreisleriana (1838) A Schumann piano masterpiece, *Kreisleriana* is cast in eight movements and was originally published with the subtitle 'Fantasien'. The initial plan to dedicate it to Clara Wieck fell foul of her father; it was dedicated to Chopin instead. Inspired by ETA Hoffmann and fired by a combination of passion and poetry, it captures the two sides of Schumann's character – the impetuous and the introspective – which he had earlier respectively personified in his alter egos Florestan and Eusebius.

● Radu Lupu *pf* (Decca, 4/95)

Schumann Zwölf Gedichte von Justinus Kerner, Op 35 (1840)

These might not be the best known of Schumann's Lieder, but for many lovers of the composer they are among his finest achievements in song, and his most substantial cycle to a single poet. Its dozen songs run from outdoorsy exuberance to nostalgia and the deepest melancholy – they are unusual, too, for encompassing a palette for emotions that go well beyond the bounds of romantic love.

● Christian Gerhaher *bar* Gerold Huber *pf* (Sony Classical, 2/19)

2 Successors

Wolf Italienisches Liederbuch (1896) The 46 songs of this wonderful two-part collection (Book 1 composed 1890-91) – to Paul Heyse's German translations of charming Italian verse – take the aphoristic brevity of some of *Dichterliebe*'s songs to a new level of gemlike perfection, while also being packed with an unexpected amount of two apparently contradictory qualities: playful, mordent wit and Wagnerian harmonic adventurousness. At once beguiling, exquisite and mischievous, they represent some of Schumann's most immediately accessible works.

● Diana Damrau *sop* Jonas Kaufmann *ten*
Helmut Deutsch *pf* (Erato, 2/19)

Janáček The Diary of One who Disappeared (1920) Compared with Schumann (or Wolf), Janáček often looked to less lofty literary sources for inspiration, and the verse he set here (relatively recently revealed to be by Ozeš Kalda) is rooted in rustic innocence and earthy emotion. A breathtaking moment comes as the cycle breaks out of its generic boundaries and the tenor protagonist is joined by a mezzo and trio of women's voices.

● Ian Bostridge *ten* Ruby Philogene *mez*
Tjomas Adès *pf* (Warner Classics, 1/02)

3 Heine operas

Wagner Der fliegende Holländer (1841)

Wagner began composing this in the same year as Schumann composed *Dichterliebe*. It takes as its source a satirical 1833 Heine novella and plays it straight to present a deadly serious tale of damnation and redemption

that set opera on a new path. Musically, it could hardly be more different from Schumann, although the Dutchman's monologue offers hand-wringing angst reminiscent of 'Der Atlas' and 'Der Doppelgänger' from Schubert's *Schwanengesang*.

● Sols; New Philh Orch / Otto Klemperer (Warner Classics, 12/68)

Puccini Le willis (1883) Puccini's first opera was hurriedly composed for a competition in 1883. There are a variety of reasons why it might not have won, but the quality of the score is certainly not one of them. It's unusual in many ways: its modest dimensions; its experimental form; and the fact that its scenario, distantly related to Heine (via the Alphonse Karr short story on which it is based), takes the composer into a mystical world of misty German forests and vengeful ghostly maidens.

● Sols; Opera Rara Chorus; LPO / Mark Elder (Opera Rara, A/19)

4 Poet's loves, artists' lives

Berlioz Symphonie fantastique (1830) It's perhaps easy to take Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* for granted and forget that it burst onto the scene in a puff of opium as early as 1830. It represents a fiercely original manifestation of the sort of Romantic subjectivity also reflected in *Dichterliebe*. Its trajectory from the idyllic early movements to the increasingly wild imaginings of the protagonist's mind brings music of blistering force and originality.

● Les Siècles / François-Xavier Roth (Harmonia Mundi, 12/19)

R Strauss Ein Heldenleben (1898) Romantic interiority is flipped on its head for this grand – and grandiloquent – quasi-autobiographical tone poem. Gone, too, is the obligatory Romantic solitude, as our hero is joined by a companion (solo violin) for a love scene, a raucous battle and a contented conclusion. As with everything by Strauss, though, irony is never far away: he saw this as a companion piece for his *Don Quixote*, which presents heroism as delusion.

● Oslo Philharmonic / Vasily Petrenko (LAWO, 8/19)

Available to stream at Apple Music

Opera



Mark Pullinger revisits a provocative production of Eugene Onegin:

'Billowing curtains flapping at the back of Tatyana's chair remain the iconic visual high point of the whole production' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 91**



Neil Fisher on a Madrid production of Kurt Weill's Street Scene :

'There is social satire, bloody tragedy, burgeoning love and a smidge of razzle-dazzle' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 94**

Charpentier

La descente d'Orphée aux enfers

Reinoud Van Mechelen *ten*.....Orphée
Déborah Cachet *sop*.....Eurydice
Geoffroy Buffière *bass*.....Pluton
Stefanie True *sop*.....Proserpine
Zsuzsi Tóth *sop*.....Daphné
Lionel Meunier *bass*.....Apollon/Titye
Clara Coutouly *sop*.....Énone
Victoria Cassano *contr*.....Aréthuse
Raphael Höhn *ten*.....Ixion
Philippe Froeliger *ten*.....Tantale

Orphée descendant aux enfers, H471

Vox Luminis / Lionel Meunier;

A Nocte Temporis / Reinoud Van Mechelen

Alpha ② ALPHA566 (82' • DDD)

Includes text, libretto and translation



Both of these pieces have been recorded before, but this seems to be the first time that they have appeared on the same disc. *Orphée descendant aux enfers*, usually described as a cantata, is more like an operatic scena. Through his singing and playing, Orpheus softens the torments that the shades of Tantalus and Ixion are undergoing in Hell. His instrument is not a lyre but a violin, whose 'Récit d'Orphée' comes after the Prelude; it's followed by the first of Orpheus's two solos, where the strings are joined by a recorder and a flute. Reinoud Van Mechelen declaims eloquently, rising to more passionate heights in the second air, 'Vos plus grands criminels'. Equally expressive on rival recordings are Jason McStoots (CPO, 3/11) and Gérard Lesne (Zig-Zag Territoires, 7/07), the latter being a countertenor rather than an *haute-contre*.

La descente d'Orphée aux enfers, lasting about an hour, was composed a couple of years later, in 1686 or 1687. A chamber opera, probably first performed at the mansion of Charpentier's patron the Duchesse de Guise, it ends with a chorus

of Shades bidding a regretful farewell to Orpheus after he has persuaded Pluto to restore Eurydice to life. Charpentier must have composed, or at least planned, a third act to round off the story. Apollo enters, as he does in Monteverdi's *Orfeo*; but rather than raising his son to the heavens he encourages him to descend to the underworld. Orpheus has neither lyre nor violin: instead, he is accompanied by two bass viols, both when addressing the three shades – Ixion and Tantalus are joined by Tityus – and when putting his case to Pluto. The music for the viols is simply ravishing, and it's beautifully played. Van Mechelen sings powerfully, with more than a touch of desperation.

The other instruments of *A Nocte Temporis* provide excellent support, the dotted figures for the violin in the 'Entrée des Fantômes' (track 22) delivered with an engaging spikiness. The first act ends with a lively piece not to be found on the recordings from the Boston Early Music Festival (CPO, 9/14) or Les Arts Florissants (Erato, 5/96). Paul Agnew's performance of Orpheus on the latter is unsurpassed; but anybody wanting these two pieces together need not hesitate in investing in these splendid new versions from Lionel Meunier and his team.

Richard Lawrence

Eötvös

Tri Sestry (Three Sisters)

Ray Chenez *counterten*.....Irina
David DQ Lee *counterten*.....Mascha
Dmitry Egorov *counterten*.....Olga
Mikołaj Trąbka *bar*.....Andrei
Eric Jurenas *counterten*.....Natascha
Mark Milhofer *ten*.....Doctor
Krešimir Stražanac *bass-bar*.....Tusenbach
Barnaby Rea *bass*.....Soljony
Thomas Faulkner *bass-bar*.....Kulygin
Iain MacNeil *bar*.....Verschinin
Alfred Reiter *bass*.....Anfisa
Isaac Lee *ten*.....Rodé
Michael McCown *ten*.....Fedotik
Frankfurt Opera and Museum Orchestra /
Dennis Russell Davies, Nikolai Petersen

Oehms ② OC986 (104' • DDD)

Recorded live, September & October 2018

Includes synopsis



After more than 20 years of frequent performances it seems right for the

Hungarian composer/conductor Peter Eötvös's adapted setting of Chekhov's 1901 classic play – in its second recording – to join Frankfurt Opera's ever-ongoing series of repertoire classics. *Three Sisters* is a big, bold statement of operatic endeavour, perhaps even more radical in its libretto-making – in collaboration with Claus H Henneberg – than its unobjectionably contemporary use of well-tried musical forms.

In this project composer and colleague have come up with a rearrangement of Chekhov's four-act original drama into a Prologue and three 'Sequences', the latter of which focus the action (substantially duplicated in the first two) around one of the main characters: Irina, the sisters' brother Andrei (as opposed to Olga) and Masha. The result is that the libretto (in Russian) itself acts like an interventionist interpretation – and investigative survey – of Chekhov's text.

Few important narrative details are actually omitted from the new opera even if their order of presentation is changed – and the 'why' behind the events (often the major subject of debate when this play is performed) becomes as important, if not more so, than the 'what' of their actual happening. It's a different, heightened dramatic tension which intentionally sets a composer challenges and opportunities that go beyond mere naturalistic illustration. In addition to this the three sisters themselves were sung at first (as in this performance) by male countertenors and their old female nurse Anfisa by a bass. A version for women in these roles also exists.

One especial feature of Eötvös's setting is his apparent enjoyment of the chance to



Star of the show: a spectacular *Rigoletto* at the Bregenz Festival on Lake Constance features an enormous animated clown's head – see review on page 93

explore the verbally ambivalent motivations of the arguments which pretty much dominate Chekhov's dramaturgy (see, for example, the dialogue between Masha and Vershinin in Sequence 3 or even Andrei's monologue in Sequence 2). There are also some rare and beautiful passages of reflection for the orchestra alone that may remind some of Bartók.

It's possible to detect some influences from Stockhausen's *Licht* cycle (a work with which Eötvös was involved as co-conductor in the years preceding the creation of *Tri Sestry*) on the Hungarian's theatrical distribution of his musical forces, his use of instrumentation and in the numbering of the so-called 'Adieux' that close each of the three sections. There are two orchestras: one in the pit of 18 including the solo winds and brass, whose accompaniments especially relate to individual characters (perhaps another *Licht* influence), and a backstage ensemble of 50 including percussion and two CD players to augment special effects. This group makes an important contribution to the offstage sounds (of events, or music) so frequently annotated by Chekhov and incorporated in the opera through Eötvös's score.

More separation between the two instrumental groups would have been helpful for the audio-only listener. It's a busy score – especially in the percussive-like (although not necessarily percussion-led) accompaniment of the many disputes between the characters that are actually rather underwritten in the text of the play: occasionally the sheer detail of sound sources here overwhelms the home listener. But a further – and most serious – problem with this new release is the lack of a libretto, or indeed of links to where one might be found. I resorted to using the one in the issue of *L'Avant-Scène Opera* (No 204, 2001) devoted to this work which came out very early in the piece's lifetime – but that's only of use if your French is adequate, and it has to be purchased.

This Frankfurt performance seems certainly livelier and less careful than the recording taken from the original performance by DG. It is acceptably recorded although there is much stage noise. I would warmly recommend the set as an example of contemporary opera with both an intriguing original subject and a challenging way of setting it. But make sure you can access a translation. The generous number of photos of Frankfurt's own stage

production and a background article which the translator struggles gamely throughout to keep from unreadable pretension should have made way for one. **Mike Ashman**

Comparative version:

Nagano (1/00) (DG) 459 694-2GH2

Handel

Agrippina

Joyce DiDonato *mez*..... Agrippina
Elsa Benoit *sop*..... Poppea
Luca Pisaroni *bass-bar*..... Claudio
Franco Fagioli *counterten*..... Nerone
Jakub Józef Orliński *counterten*..... Ottone
Andrea Mastroni *bass*..... Pallante
Carlo Vistoli *counterten*..... Narciso
Biagio Pizzuti *bar*..... Lesbo
Marie-Nicole Lemieux *mez*..... Giunone

Il Pomo d'Oro / Maxim Emelyanychev

Erato ™ ③ 9029 53365-8 (3h 50' • DDD)

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



The climax of Handel's Italian sojourn, *Agrippina* ran and ran after its sensational Venice premiere early in 1710. As told by the composer's first biographer,

John Mainwaring, audiences were ‘thunderstruck by the grandeur and sublimity of his style, for never had they known till then all the powers of harmony and modulation so closely arrayed, and so forcibly combined’. Handelian ‘grandeur’ and ‘sublimity’ – beyond anything the Venetians had experienced – are fitfully glimpsed in the music for the Machiavellian tiger mother Agrippina and Ottone (Otho), the only character in the opera with a shred of integrity. Modern audiences, though, are more likely to be struck by the music’s piquancy and charm. In essence an antiheroic comedy, *Agrippina* is arguably the lightest and, in a half-decent production, funniest of his operas: a tart satire of sex (the women hold all the cards) and political corruption that unfolds in compact, snappy arias, many of them quarried from Handel’s Italian cantatas. Early audiences doubtless picked up many a contemporary resonance, not least the sybaritic, self-important Roman Emperor Claudius as a caricature of the aged Louis XIV and/or Pope Clement.

A few months before he conducted Barrie Kosky’s wacky, witty production at Covent Garden, Maxim Emelyanychev made a commercial recording of *Agrippina* in Italy with his own period orchestra and three of the Covent Garden cast, including Joyce DiDonato in the title-role and Franco Fagioli as her unlovely son Nero. The results are at least a match for the excellent recordings by John Eliot Gardiner (Philips, 6/97) and René Jacobs (Harmonia Mundi, 1/12), both with slightly different texts. This new recording uses the edition by Peter Jones and David Vickers based on what was performed in Venice rather than Handel’s autograph. Inter alia, we get a longer ballet sequence at the end and a touching continuo aria ‘Spera alma mia’ (replacing the flighty ‘Bella pur’) that adds a note of tenderness to Poppea’s character.

As at Covent Garden, DiDonato effortlessly dominates proceedings with her mix of hauteur, sensuous beauty of tone and acute, specific characterisation. Double-speak is her default setting; and even at her most ingratiating, as in her blithe aria to Poppea ‘Non hò cor’, DiDonato never lets you forget that here is one of the most ruthlessly manipulative women in Roman history (and there is plenty of competition). The American mezzo releases her inner Amneris in the magnificent, troubled soliloquy ‘Pensieri, voi mi tormentate’, and finally makes peace with her husband Claudius in a meltingly sung ‘Se vuoi pace’, a ravishing minuet aria that Handel reworked for a revival of *Belshazzar* nearly half a century later.

As Agrippina’s rival in manipulation, the French soprano Elsa Benoit is a delectable Poppea, both knowing and sympathetic. She luxuriates in her physical allure in ‘Vaghe perle’, and wraps Nero around her little finger in the bouncy gigue ‘Col peso’. In sexual charisma Benoit’s Poppea eclipses both Donna Brown, for Gardiner, and Jacobs’s pallid Sunhae Im. At Covent Garden Franco Fagioli played Nero as a tattooed teenaged psychopath. Tattoos apart, the future emperor certainly comes across as neurotically unstable in Fagioli’s over-the-top performance. Though his tone can be plummy and his words indistinct, he dispatches his two showpieces in Act 3 with his trademark devil-may-care bravado. As Nero’s temperamental opposite Otho, Jakub Józef Orliński sings with rounded tone and a sure feeling for Handelian line, whether in his hushed, inward account of the great lament ‘Voi che udite’ or in the exquisite ‘Vaghe fonte’, with its gently purling recorders.

Luca Pisaroni uses the subterranean depths of his bass to good effect as the faintly absurd Emperor Claudius, though he sounds too lugubrious in his love song to Poppea ‘Vieni o cara’ – one of the opera’s loveliest tunes. Carlo Vistoli and the teak-voiced bass Andrea Mastroni make their mark as the hopelessly besotted double act of Pallante and Narciso. At times I felt that the recitatives could move at a more natural conversational pace, as they do on the Jacobs recording. But Emelyanychev’s direction of his responsive band – fierier than Gardiner’s, less interventionist than Jacobs’s – combines fizzing theatrical energy with due regard for the opera’s more reflective moments. A word, too, for the eloquent first oboe, a crucial player in this opera. With DiDonato nonpareil in the title-role and a uniformly strong cast, this now becomes a first choice for Handel’s Venetian masterpiece. **Richard Wigmore**

Offenbach

Un mari à la porte

Patrizio La Placa bar Henri Martel
Marina Ogii mez Suzanne
Matteo Mezzaro ten Florestan Ducroquet
Francesca Benitez sop Rosita
Orchestra of the Maggio Musicale, Florence /
Valerio Galli

Stage directors **Luigi Di Gangi, Ugo Giacomazzi**

Video director **Matteo Ricchetti**

Dynamic © CDS7844; © DVD 37844; © Blu-ray 57844
 (47) • DDD • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1,
 DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live, February 2019

Includes synopsis; CD includes libretto and translation



If there’s one thing that last year’s Offenbach anniversary celebrations demonstrated, it’s the sheer inexhaustibility of his well of melody. There’s hardly a single one of his 98 operettas that doesn’t throw up something fresh, memorable and delicious, and that’s certainly the case with *Un mari à la porte*: a featherweight one-act farce from 1859. The RLPO recorded it a few years back (9/12), and its lollipop number – the ‘Tyrolean waltz’ ‘J’entends ma belle’ – occasionally makes it on to recital discs, but so far as I can tell this is the only staged performance on DVD.

And if it’s not quite Offenbach’s daftest score – no singing dogs, dead parrots or laxative jokes, anyway – it’s still pretty daft. Florestan, a penniless operetta composer, is fleeing a bailiff when he tumbles down a chimney into Suzanne’s boudoir. But it’s Suzanne’s wedding day, and as she and her friend Rosita wonder what to do with him, her new husband Henri is wondering why he’s been locked out of the room. That’s more or less it, and Luigi Di Gangi and Ugo Giacomazzi, directors of this 2019 staging from the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, treat it as a huge cartoon. Suzanne’s room is a shabby-chic gilded cage, and the brightly coloured costumes, by Agnese Rabatti, all have something of the circus about them.

The performances are comparably broad – gestures are flamboyant and there’s a lot of mugging and slapstick. The musical numbers – conducted with a delightful lightness of touch by Valerio Galli – offer some respite from the silliness: Francesca Benitez, as Rosita, could perhaps handle her coloratura with a little more poise but she plays engagingly off Marina Ogii as a beehive-haired Suzanne, and they make a piquant blend with Matteo Mezzaro’s unmistakably Italianate Florestan – really all that matters in a piece that’s predominantly a series of ensembles, though he hams up his one big solo, the ‘Lamentation Couplets’, very entertainingly.

Still, I wish they hadn’t put Patrizio La Placa (Henri) in face-paint that makes him resemble a robot, even if Offenbach originally conceived him as little more than an offstage effect. This is silly stuff, for sure, but it takes only a tiny hint of humanity to make these absurd characters come to life and for the whole to feel like something more than just a series of catchy melodies linked by pratfalls and squeals. It’s

the comic energy that really carries the day here and the video direction captures it simply but effectively. I laughed, and I'm still humming the tunes, and I don't think Offenbach would have asked for more.

Richard Bratby

Tasca

A Santa Lucia

Ray M Wade, Jr *ten* Ciccillo
Iordanka Derilova *sop* Rosella
Cornelia Marschall *sop* Concettina
Ulf Paulsen *bar* Totonno
Rita Kapfhammer *contr* Maria
Cezary Rotkiewicz *bass-bar* Tore
David Ameln *ten* Voice of a Fisherman
Choruses of the Anhaltisches Theater, Dessau;
Anhaltische Philharmonie, Dessau /
Markus L Frank
CPO © CPO555 181-2 (73' • DDD)
Recorded live, April 1, 2017
Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



The feared Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick was full of praise for

A Santa Lucia but then he was using Tasca's slice of Neapolitan life as a stick to beat its model, *Cavalleria rusticana*, so what did he know? After its successful premiere at the Kroll Opera in November 1892, *A Santa Lucia* became a vehicle for the 28-year-old Neapolitan diva Bellincioni, who had created the role of Santuzza, and Hanslick was bewitched by her most of all: 'It borders on the miraculous how word and gesture, sound and facial expression inseparably converge in most convincing truth, in most touching emotion ... And in this realistic truth, even in passionate affects, Bellincioni keeps things within measure and preserves a feeling of beauty.'

By that measure the Bulgarian soprano Iordanka Derilova has a lot to live up to.

In the Pathé discs made near the end of her career Bellincioni could still call upon a light and quick vibrato, and a relatively youthful centre to her voice. Derilova's mezzo-ish timbres rather call to mind later, memorably fiery Santuzza singers from the east such as Obratzova and Elena Nicolai. She is well contrasted with Rita Kapfhammer as Maria, the villain of the piece, and their swiftly pointed second-act scene draws on the energy of the Dessau theatre's staging, in a live-sounding recording with minimal stage noise and no applause, to invite favourable comparison with later *verismo* showdowns such as the Act 3 party scene in *Adriana Lecouvreur*.

All the same, Pierantonio Tasca's almost total obscurity is understandable: his best-known piece lived and died with Bellincioni, and the Sicilian-born composer does not share Mascagni's melodic gifts, Cilea's sense of theatre or Puccini's orchestral genius. Named after and set in a gritty harbour district of Naples, *A Santa Lucia* cries out for the kind of dark and swirling sound world of *Il tabarro* but receives instead a picture-postcard setting replete with mandolins, guitars and a none-too-well-tuned organ for the inevitable first-act climax in a church.

That story is the work of the Neapolitan poet Enrico Golisciani, later librettist for Wolf-Ferrari's *Jewels of the Madonna*, stronger on local colour and repartee than really telling lines. In brief: the fisherman Ciccillo loves the penniless Rosella. With her he has a daughter, whom all believe to be the child of his late sister. According to Neapolitan custom, Ciccillo has been engaged since childhood to Maria, who flares up at any sign of affection between Rosella and Ciccillo. He goes to sea for a year; his father takes Rosella as a household help and falls in love with the young woman, not knowing that this will make him his son's rival. Maria uses her knowledge to make the returned Ciccillo

furiously jealous. He repels Rosella, who plunges into the sea. Cue the mandolins.

None of the roles is glamorously sung and there are plenty of rough edges to the Dessau orchestra's playing, but the blood flows thanks to Markus Frank's sensitive and flexible conducting, and fans of *verismo* rarities need not hesitate. Peter Quantrill

Tchaikovsky

Eugene Onegin

Mariusz Kwiecień *bar* Eugene Onegin
Tatiana Monogarova *sop* Tatyana
Andrey Dunaev *ten* Lensky
Margarita Mamsirova *mez* Olga
Anatolij Kotscherga *bass* Gremin
Makvala Kasrashvili *sop* Larina
Emma Sarkisyan *mez* Filipyevna
Valery Gilmanov *bass* Zaretsky
Bolshoi Theatre Chorus and Orchestra /
Alexander Vedernikov

Stage director Dmitri Tcherniakov

Video director Chloé Perlemuter

BelAir Classiques © ② DVD BAC246;

© BAC446 (150' + 26' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •

DTS-HD MA5.1, DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Opéra National de Paris, September 2008

Bonus: Onegin at the Palais Garnier

Includes synopsis



Galina Vishnevskaya, one of the great Tatyans of the 20th century, vowed never to set foot inside the Bolshoi again

after seeing Dmitri Tcherniakov's new production of *Eugene Onegin* in 2006. I saw it four years later when the company brought it to Covent Garden and found it highly infuriating, deliberately fighting against Pushkin, against Tchaikovsky. Does time heal? This was my first taste of Tcherniakov and I've seen a lot by this Muscovite *enfant terrible* since – the good,

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the bad and the downright ugly. What I have noted is that he tends to bring something special to Russian repertoire (*The Tsar's Bride*, *Prince Igor*, *The Invisible City of Kitezh*, *Snow Maiden*, *Tsar Saltan*), so it was interesting to revisit his *Onegin*, filmed at the Garnier in Paris in 2008 and now released for the first time on DVD and Blu-ray, for some serious re-evaluation.

The period is indistinct, but updated, with many scenes reminiscent of Chekhov. There are just two sets for the work's seven 'lyric scenes'; a reception room in the Larin household for Acts 1 and 2 and the equivalent in a St Petersburg mansion for Act 3. Both are dominated by enormous oval tables capable of seating at least 20 guests, which means there is no room for dancing – a perverse decision when dance is central to each act. None of the action takes place out of doors, Tcherniakov thus ignoring the libretto's directions in order to create a hermetically sealed, pressure-cooker atmosphere.

The overwhelming presence of the over-populated dining table means that too many private scenes are made public, with characters' soliloquies delivered to others: Tatyana rather oddly addresses the guests, who are very properly taking tea at the Larins' in the first scene – no peasants here, thank you – about letting her dreams carry her away; Lensky's aria 'Kuda, kuda' is largely addressed to a sympathetic old maid while other servants clear the table from the previous day's party; Onegin's Act 3 musings about how high society bores him are delivered to said high society guests who, during the polonaise, had pointedly ignored him; and Tatyana's torment at re-encountering Onegin is confessed to her husband.

Aspects of Tcherniakov's production irritate me less now. Lensky's death becomes a tragic accident, Onegin refusing to take the rifle for their duel, resulting in a tussle during which Lensky is shot. Onegin eventually returns to Petersburg a hysterical wreck and threatens Tatyana that he will shoot himself. He applies a pistol to his temple only to discover that the barrel's empty.

There are great strengths too. The Letter Scene works remarkably well. Tatyana, rather than putting pen to paper, 'composes' her letter to Onegin by addressing the chair on which he had been seated that afternoon. A storm rages outside, the wind smashing in the windows. Billowing curtains flapping at the back of Tatyana's chair remain the iconic visual high point of the whole production.

Onegin's rejection of Tatyana is delivered from opposite sides of the oval table, mirrored in the finale, where the tables are, literally, turned, as Tatyana coldly rejects him.

Whatever one thinks of Tcherniakov's concepts – at least there is no group therapy here – he always draws excellent performances from his casts, who clearly buy into his ideas. Here, Mariusz Kwiecień is a magnetic Onegin, cold, aloof and wonderfully laconic, his smooth baritone adding to his allure. Tatiana Monogarova is ideal as her namesake, with a lovely creamy quality to her soprano. Her Tatyana makes the transition from awkward girl to imperious princess most impressively. Andrey Dunaev's Lensky is light-voiced and suitably gawky. By 2008, Anatolij Kotscherga was already a shadow of his former self as Prince Gremin, singing a lumpily phrased aria, struggling to maintain any sort of legato, his once-black bass seriously underpowered. Makvala Kasrashvili's Madame Larina is a vulgar caricature, flapping around hysterically. Alexander Vedernikov draws excellent playing from his Bolshoi Theatre Orchestra.

It's certainly worth seeing this staging and, with such excellent vocal performances, it bears repeated listening at the very least. **Mark Pullinger**

Verdi

Rigoletto

Vladimir Stoyanov bar.....Rigoletto
Mélissa Petit sop.....Gilda
Stephen Costello ten.....Duke
Miklós Sebestyén bass-bar.....Sparafucile
Katrin Wundsam mez.....Giovanna/Maddalena
Paul Schweinester ten.....Borsa
Wolfgang Stefan Schwaiger bar.....Marullo
Kostas Smoriginas bass-bar.....Monterone
Jorge Eleazar bar.....Count Ceprano
Bregenz Festival Choir; Prague Philharmonic Choir; Vienna Symphony Orchestra / Enrique Mazzola

Stage director **Philipp Stölzl**

Video director **Felix Breisach**

C Major Entertainment © DVD 751608;

© Blu-ray 751704 (125' + 29' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •

DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live, July 17 & 18, 2019

Bonus: Making of Rigoletto – a film by Ingrid Bertel

Includes synopsis



There's no denying the star attraction of Philipp Stölzl's new *Rigoletto* for the Bregenz Festival: his €8 million set. Of the

30 press photos released last summer, 27 were of the 14-metre-high clown's head that forms the centre of the lakeside stage along with two giant hands, one grasping a balloon. This clown's head is versatile – it bobs, tilts and pivots, its mouth opens, its eyes blink and stare, its eyeballs roll around. It's an impressive construction but not a little freaky; coulrophobics beware.

The clown represents Rigoletto himself, of course, the Duke of Mantua's caustic jester. He lives with his secret daughter, Gilda, hiding her within one of the clown's hands. The Duke is a lascivious ringmaster, his court a travelling circus including jugglers, acrobats and apes as bellboys. Sparafucile and Maddalena are a knife-throwing double act. Singers clamber all over the clown: the duke reclines in a hammock resting on its brow, Gilda – her long lashes making her appear like a doll – sings 'Caro nome' from high up in the hot-air balloon ... a symbol of freedom? In Act 2, Rigoletto carries a balloon around with him which Marullo snips to release during the jester's heartfelt 'Cortigiani'. Hope flies off into the night. During his vendetta duet with Gilda, Rigoletto dons comedy 'big hands' and knocks giant heads off 'Duca' ringmasters, a miscalculation prompting flashbacks to television's *Jeux sans frontières*. A tremendous storm is whipped up in Act 3 (this was a clear night, but Bregenz often provides its own precipitation!).

It's perhaps inevitable that in an open-air venue such as Bregenz – essentially arena opera with an audience of 7000 – the emphasis has to be on a spectacular production. But it would be wrong to overshadow the singers here, who do an amazing job under such physically demanding conditions. Vladimir Stoyanov is excellent as Rigoletto, his oaky baritone not unlike the great Leo Nucci, who sang this role over 500 times. The camera picks up nuances in Stoyanov's acting that wouldn't have been visible to the audience. Mélissa Petit sings well as Gilda, spinning a fine coloratura considering her highwire physical – as well as vocal – situation. She's especially affecting in her death scene (when her double floats off in the balloon). Stephen Costello sings the Duke stylishly, even if he isn't a very charismatic seducer. Miklós Sebestyén is a suitably sinister Sparafucile and Katrin Wundsam a juicy Maddalena.

I'm not sure how the amplified voices sounded in the venue but here on film they are caught very well, not appearing too artificial. Enrique Mazzola and the Wiener Symphoniker, beamed in from the nearby

festival hall in a feat of incredible coordination, provide buoyant support at sprightly tempos. A most enjoyable production and performance, even if clowns do give you the heebie-jeebies.

Mark Pullinger

Verdi

'I vespri verdiani'

Attila - Liberamente or piangi ... Oh! Nel fuggente nuvolo; Santo di patria ... Allor che i forti corrono ... Da te questo or m'è concesso.

Un ballo in maschera - Morrò, ma prima in grazia. **Il corsaro** - Egli non riede ancora! ... Non so le tette immagini. **Ernani** - Surta è la notte, e Silva non ritorna! ... Ernani! Ernani, involami.

Luisa Miller - Tu puniscimi, o signore. **Macbeth** - Una macchia è qui tuttora; Nel dì della vittoria io le incontrai ... Vieni! T'affretta! Accendere ... Or tutti sorgete. **I masnadieri** - Dall'infame banchetto ... Tu del mio Carlo al seno ... Carlo vive?. **La traviata** - È strano! ... Ah, forse è lui ... Sempre libera. **Il trovatore** - Ne' tornei! V'apparve ... Tacea la notte placida. **I vespri siciliani** - Arrigo! ah! parli a un core; Mercé, dilette amiche

Olga Mykytenko *sop* Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra / Kirill Karabits
Chandos © CHAN20144 (74' • DDD)
Includes texts and translations



'Is there such a thing as a "Verdian Soprano"?' asks the booklet to this debut

release from Olga Mykytenko. Everyone will have their answer, and their own ideal, but the Ukrainian soprano seems only intermittently to come close. She's a serious artist, clearly, and a veteran of several major opera stages, and she obviously cares deeply about her craft. It doesn't take long to build an idea of where her strengths are: mainly in a sturdy, often beautiful upper middle range.

It's a voice that lacks polish and richness on its surface, though, and a firm, steely core at its centre; there's that hint of vinegar familiar from traditional *spintos* but without the attendant power. High notes can be precarious and thin, or squally, while Mykytenko's chest voice is weak and underpowered – one understands why she steers clear of Verdi's first great soprano role, Abigaille in *Nabucco*.

Without a sturdy enough vocal apparatus Mykytenko's interpretations can be difficult to enjoy. In the opening number from *I masnadieri*, as with several others, technical hurdles are cleared only with difficulty. The result too often is a sense of sagging tension (in a lumpy 'Tacea la

notte', for example), which Kirill Karabits, conducting the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, seems neither able nor willing to counteract.

The *Macbeth* excerpts are far better, proving dramatically engaging and vocally persuasive, and Odabella's Act 1 aria from *Atilla* is impressively done, too, showing what fine artistry Mykytenko is capable of. But this is otherwise not a great showcase for her talents, vocal or dramatic.

Hugo Shirley

Wagner

Tristan und Isolde

Andreas Schager *ten* Tristan
Rachel Nicholls *sop* Isolde
John Relyea *bass-bar* Marke
Brett Polegato *bar* Kurwenal
Andrew Rees *ten* Melot
Michelle Breedt *mez* Brangäne
Rainer Trost *ten* Young Sailor
Gregory Bonfatti *ten* Shepherd
Gianfranco Montresor *bar* Steersman
Chorus and Orchestra of Rome Opera / Daniele Gatti

Stage director **Pierre Audi**

Video director **Annalisa Butto**

C Major Entertainment © ③ 752208;

© 752304 (3h 59' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •

DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live 2016

Includes synopsis



German opera still seems slower following up its newcomers than its Italian counterpart (unless we're talking Jonas Kaufmann).

This show would have been better released four years ago when it was recorded and its leads, Austrian Andreas Schager and Brit Rachel Nicholls, were first making Wagnerian names for themselves. As it is, the mix of novelty and experience from the rest of the cast looks good on paper in combination with the Bayreuth achievements of maestro Gatti and the Amsterdam track record of stage director Pierre Audi.

Immediately there's well-prepared singing and good coordination with the pit. Yet, at least in the first two acts, the results are surprisingly, yet dramatically, dull. I blame the rather subfusc designs of Christof Hetzer: costumes (sorry!) look like an attempt to recreate Wieland Wagner's 1960s mock medieval out of quilt covers and anoraks. The minimal scenery of dirty metal-coloured walls and flats, or in Act 2 primitive curved standing stones, again suggest a deliberately non-

Romanticised Middle Ages, perhaps also following a Wieland belief that there were genuine relics of Tristan's life in Cornwall.

Then, in Act 3 due to a stroke of illogical but inspiring directorial intervention, the cast all appear without wigs or hair-dressing. It's as if a weight is lifted from their backs and Audi's simple but emotionally telling directing carries the day in every moment. There are surprises too – not least for Brangäne, who dies from a Kurwenal sword-thrust just as the other 'invaders' of Tristan's castle who appear with Marke. And that works too, contributing to the general heartbreak of the final moments.

The two main soloists are good here – they're both wonderfully respectful of text and project their words clearly even when there's a bit too much volume coming up from the pit (and hearing *Tristan* for once away from the aural defences of the Bayreuth pit is quite a shock). Polegato and Relyea have totally bought into the intentional minimalism of Audi's direction and are the more moving for it; Breedt flaps around a bit too much but sounds fine.

Gatti has brought his orchestra up in the piece well. He's lively and never self-indulgent but I think you can hear that this ensemble's great *Tristans* are still to come. The filming is like reportage; we get the idea but there's no special understanding of Audi's and Hetzer's work and certainly not of Jean Kalman's lighting. So unless you're carefully monitoring Wagnerian beginners, I would stick with tried small-screen favourites: Schneider and Marthaler (Opus Arte, 5/10) or Barenboim and Ponnelle (DG, 11/07) from Bayreuth, Barenboim and Chéreau from La Scala (Virgin/Erato). **Mike Ashman**

Weill

Street Scene

Paulo Szot *bar* Frank Maurant
Patricia Racette *sop* Anna Maurant
Mary Bevan *sop* Rose Maurant
Joel Prieto *ten* Sam Kaplan
Lucy Schauer *mez* Emma Jones
Jeni Bern *sop* Greta Fiorentino
Michael J Scott *ten* Lippo Fiorentino
Tyler Clarke *ten* Daniel Buchanan
Marta Fontanals-Simmons *mez* Jennie Hildebrand
Eric Greene *bar* Henry Davis
Richard Burkhard *bar* Harry Easter
Sarah-Marie Maxwell *sng* Mae Jones
Dominic Lamb *sng* Dick McGann
Chorus and Orchestra of the Teatro Real, Madrid / Tim Murray

Stage director **John Fulljames**

Video director **Jérémy Cu villier**

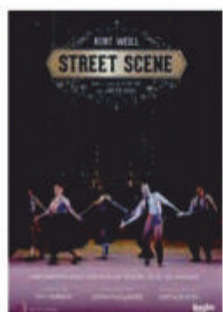


Kurt Weill's striking, occasionally bewildering *Street Scene* is a drama that has bridged the divide between musical and opera

BelAir Classiques (F) DVD BAC162; (F) SACD BAC562
(160' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live, February 2018

Includes synopsis



Street Scene appeared on Broadway in 1947 and never returned to the Great White Way.

But if it was not embraced as a musical, Kurt Weill's drama has been enthusiastically taken up by opera companies, and this production by John Fulljames has had a long life, having first appeared on a much smaller scale at the Young Vic in London in 2008. As recorded from the Teatro Real de Madrid in early 2018, Dick Bird's sets, evoking tenement life in New York in the Forties, have been impressively upgraded, and a large ensemble cast, including actors, dancers and cavorting children, has room to build a real world.

Evoking two days during a hot Manhattan summer, a real world is

what Weill wanted to build out of Elmer Rice's play, which the playwright himself adapted with Weill, alongside lyricist Langston Hughes. The focus shifts rapidly from character to character, some only loosely sketched in. There is social satire, bloody tragedy, burgeoning love and a smidge of razzle-dazzle (with room for Arthur Pita's perky choreography). The score jumps all over the place, a remarkable and remarkably modernist patchwork of styles.

Conducted by Tim Murray, the Madrid players treat all of it elegantly. There are Puccini-esque duets, bluesy monologues and, in 'What good would the moon be', the sort of sentimental ballad you could easily imagine Doris Day singing in a spangly MGM movie. But the bittersweet tang of the Berlin-era Kurt Weill remains in such numbers as 'A boy like you', where the ill-fated, mistreated Mrs Maurant (an incisive, earthy Patricia Racette) tells her badly behaved son that she's relying on him to turn into a good man. The argument of *Street Scene*, however (and one that Weill's old sparring partner Bertolt Brecht would

fully endorse), is that goodness is too expensive if you're on the breadline.

It's a striking, sometimes bewildering piece: dramaturgically, unfortunately, it's slightly clunky, and ultimately downbeat. Fulljames's years of devotion to the work do pay off, however, and he offers both intimacy and spectacle. When it comes to the singers, a lot is being asked of the Madrid cast. Sizzling 'Nooo Yoik' put-downs are delivered in a variety of different accents and registers, not all of them relating to whichever ethnicity or class they are supposed to be channelling.

Young lovers Sam Kaplan (Joel Prieto) and Rose Maurant (Mary Bevan) sound sweet but are uncertainly portrayed. As thuggish Frank Maurant, Paulo Szot lacks hard-boiled menace. But Lucy Schauer is excellent as the beaky, shrewish Mrs Jones, Eric Greene is a warm janitor (armed with the hit number 'I got a marble and a star') and as a diligent schoolgirl Marta Fontanals-Simmons leads a lovely rendition of another delightful song, 'Wrapped in a ribbon and tied in a bow'.

Neil Fisher

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The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

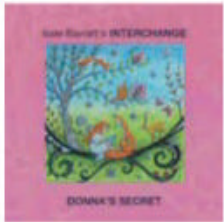
Jazz

Brought to you by **jazzwise**

Donna's Secret

Issie Barratt's Interchange

Fuzzy Moon Records © FUZ 015



Both ad hoc band and composers' showcase, Interchange typifies Issie Barratt's work as educator, activist and artist. In the latter role, she has focused on large ensembles in a way rare for British female jazz musicians, eight of whom are offered the format's compositional opportunities here. Interchange are mostly a 10-piece, with Karen Street's accordion largely substituting for piano to ensure gig practicality. Street's 'Still Here' typifies an often soothing, restorative response to common themes of sickness and violent tumult. Cassie Kinoshi gives a harsher edge of dark, brassy funk to 'Caliban', as Chelsea Carmichael's tenor capers like Shakespeare's

ambiguous slave-monster. Shirley Smart's 'Palmyra' blows cymbal-washes and jostling percussion through a swirling celebration of life in Middle Eastern cities, before chittering discord signals its decimation. Barratt's own 'Samla Korna Med Kulning' gives choral majesty to Nordic female herders' unique songs. Most memorably, Carol Jarvis's 'Hope' uses Jessica Radcliffe's vocodered voice to urge a long cancer struggle towards the light. **Nick Hasted**

The Black Peril

Soweto Kinch

Soweto Kinch Productions © SKP 005CD



Commissioned for the 2019 London Jazz Festival, *The Black Peril* is arguably one of saxophonist-rapper-composer Kinch's most ambitious projects to date. Referring to the

race riots that took place in Britain, America and Europe in 1919, the music is an in-depth and provocative meditation on the essential question of social unrest and media manipulation of the fear-inducing 'other/alien' represented by Africans and Caribbeans. Kinch explicitly taps into the sound of the age; namely American ragtime, and melds it with ancestral Jamaican rhythmic lexicons such as kumina and the modern-day machine-based beats of hip-hop. The result is both dense and exhilarating, particularly as the range of instrumentation, from West African percussion to banjo and tuba, also adds to the sense of time travelling as well as political unpacking. That last element is also emphatically reinforced by Kinch's incisive rapping and a number of shifting time signatures that convey the disorientation of the period in question, certainly for those classed as ethnic minorities. **Kevin Le Gendre**

World Music

Brought to you by **SONGLINES**

Tall Fiddler

Michael Cleveland

Compass Records © COM47372



This is good-time bluegrass played by a fiddler at the top of his game. Michael Cleveland has teamed up with some extremely talented pals here. Weatherbeaten lead vocals from guest Tim O'Brien make the barnstorming '20 Cent Cotton and 90 Cent Meat' and the more reflective 'Old Time River Man' collaborations made in bluegrass heaven. O'Brien also rustles up some gobsmacking mandolin beside Béla Fleck's ebullient banjo on the jazzy instrumental '5-String Swing'. Even the rather cheesy honky-tonk country of 'Tennessee Plates' is pretty enjoyable: this time it's Sam Bush on vocal and mandolin duties. The Cleveland-Fleck fiddle and

banjo duet 'Tarnation' doesn't disappoint. An epic voyage, it starts off as head-nodding blues before dramatically upping the tempo. The pair give every millimetre of their instruments such a thorough going over that it's a wonder they haven't been sanded into sawdust by the end of it. **Matt Milton**

Old Wow

Sam Lee

Cooking Vinyl © COOKCD743 / COOKLP743



'The old wow never wears thin,' Sam Lee sings in 'The Garden of England', the opening track of his prodigiously ambitious third album. It is a fitting beginning, a radical reworking of 'The Seeds of Love' – the first song collected by Cecil Sharp, and which kick-started the folk revival of the early 20th century.

The title came to Lee when, walking in Scotland, a buzzard swooped just above his head, giving him a sudden sense of wonder and connection with the natural world. Lee uses the term 'old wow' to describe this enlightening realisation – what the religious (and James Joyce) call an epiphany. Lee's epiphany also describes, he says, 'those experiences which exist beyond the natural realm which are often described in our folk songs.' It is this that *Old Wow* explores.

The album is produced by Bernard Butler, who weaves wonderful soundscapes – with Matthew Barley's cello, Caoimhín Ó Raghallaigh's Hardanger d'amore, the voice of Elizabeth Fraser, Misha Mullov-Abbado's bass and percussion – and Lee wanders around these, as he might in the wilds of Scotland. He rambles a bit slowly, but sometimes *Old Wow* swoops down and suddenly everything becomes intense and clear. **Julian May**

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REISSUES & ARCHIVE

Our monthly guide to the most exciting catalogue releases, historic issues and box-sets

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Pierre Monteux's Decca years

Andrew Farach-Colton welcomes back the great French conductor's late recordings

Pierre Monteux was already in his 80s when he began recording for Decca in 1956 as part of a deal with American RCA. The first records under this new agreement were made in Paris with the Conservatory Orchestra and devoted to Stravinsky's early ballets – arguably the works with which he was most closely associated, as he'd played under Pierné for the premiere of *The Firebird* and conducted the premieres of both *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring*. Although this *Rite* (his fourth on disc) was recorded in stereo, it sounds considerably paler both in conception and execution than the ferocious and sharply focused account he'd made with the Boston Symphony five years earlier. The Parisian orchestra's ensemble is also quite ragged, and yet their playing feels more balletic – listen to the springiness of 'Les Augures printaniers', for example. Much the same can be said for their performances of *Petrushka* and the suite from *The Firebird*, and what a pleasure it is to hear these scores not as orchestral showpieces but with their roots still firmly planted in the theatre.

Several recordings contained in this Decca box have never been out of the catalogue, and nearly all have been reissued at one time or another, most recently in a series from Australian Eloquence. Still, such a comprehensive and handsomely compact survey is convenient for collectors, and the opportunity to listen all the way through can be its own reward, the process illuminating the threads that make up the fabric of an interpreter's art. Hearing Monteux's justly celebrated account of Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé* alongside the Stravinsky ballets, for instance, one can appreciate how illustrative his reading is where so many other conductors focus on the music's colour and orchestral legerdemain. The LSO is in top form here, capturing the score's ecstatic element in a

way that's often thrilling, yet this passion is balanced by clear-sighted direction; for all Monteux's attention to detail, he never gets lost in it. Aside from an oddly unsettled *Boléro*, the other Ravel performances are just as impressive. *Mother Goose* evokes a magical, tender atmosphere, and the *Rapsodie espagnole* is at once volatile and mysterious – note how Monteux holds back at the beginning of the 'Feria' so there's a sense of growing, cumulative excitement. Even the *Pavane pour une infante défunte* sounds freshly conceived, the veiled tone of the LSO strings at 1'49" almost heartbreaking in their expressive sincerity.

It's a real treat to rediscover the LP-length excerpts from Tchaikovsky's *Sleeping Beauty* and *Swan Lake*, for both are delectably sweet without any hint of saccharine, and felicitously phrased. Here, again, Monteux's pacing evokes the theatre – try, say, the Danse espagnole from *Swan Lake*, which is played by the LSO with terrific panache and rhythmic point at a slower-than-usual tempo. Hearing Monteux's reading of Debussy's *Images* in this wider context also gave me a greater appreciation for the profound subtlety of his interpretation, particularly in 'Ibéria', which is unexpectedly delicate, even intimate. He doesn't even aim for a knockout punch at the end, à la Reiner, instead providing an evocative flourish that provides a natural segue to the shifting, dreamlike lyricism of 'Rondes de printemps'. In *Le Martyre de saint Sébastien*, from the same 1963 sessions, there's similar care for shading, although here it seems to be done in pencil and charcoal unlike *Images*'s colourful oils.

There aren't many disappointments in these two-dozen CDs, but there are a few. A 1957 Rimsky *Scheherazade* lacks the imagination and flair of Beecham's version (recorded that same year). A genial Dvořák's Seventh abounds with affection, but does so,

I feel, at the expense of the music's rugged emotional core. Monteux's lyrical approach is more persuasive in Brahms's Second, although in the first of two recordings in this set, the Vienna Philharmonic seems under-rehearsed; the LSO 'remake' has less old-world charm but is better disciplined and altogether more persuasive.

In general, I find that the recordings Monteux made with the VPO fail to show either the conductor or the orchestra at their best – the playing in Schubert's *Rosamunde* music and Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, for instance, is startlingly far from world-class – with a few exceptions. Beethoven's First is not without its awkward moments, but the finale's joie de vivre is contagious. The *Pastoral* is also better than I'd remembered: flowing and forthright, with a welcome hint of rusticity. It was with the LSO, however, that Monteux made the most memorable performances in a cobbled-together Beethoven cycle. The Second and Fourth are both ideally judged from start to finish – listen, for example, to the Fourth's opening *Allegro vivace*, where he demonstrates just how much excitement can be generated at a relatively relaxed tempo. If sent to a desert island, I'd be content to live with both recordings for the rest of my days.

Decca provides a supplementary disc of various rehearsal segments, all previously issued, I believe. The only thing new to CD is a 35-minute Ravel programme with the RPO conducted by Monteux's son Claude. The orchestra play well for him, but the Phase 4 sound is poorly balanced and the interpretations routine. But don't let that give you pause. This box offers bounteous proof that Monteux's Indian summer was indeed a glorious one. **G**

THE RECORDING

Pierre Monteux Complete Decca Recordings
Decca (24 discs) 4834711

György Sándor: the Bartók pianist

Rob Cowan compares the Hungarian pianist's early Vox and later CBS recordings

Although there are numerous flavoursome goodies presented here for our delectation, the music of Béla Bartók is the pivot around which everything else revolves. György Sándor was a Bartók pupil who premiered the Third Piano Concerto (his punchy 1946 recording under Ormandy features as part of the present set) and made the first near-complete recording of the solo piano music (for Vox, now in a VoxBox). Prior to Sándor's survey Andor Foldes had programmed a goodly proportion of the piano works for DG, excluding, among other works, the magical sequence of 14 Bagatelles which in terms of style approximates a cross between the Prokofiev of *Visions fugitives* and Bill Evans, music distinguished by captivating mood swings and inventive asides. Sándor has the measure of their every colourful gesture, more so I'd say as recorded for CBS than its vivid but less atmospheric Vox predecessor.

As to the gritty big works (Sonata, *Out of Doors*, *Improvisations*) the Vox and CBS/Sony performances are conceptually similar, though Vox's more aggressive recordings stress the music's percussive element. Then there are the 153 progressive piano pieces that make up *Mikrokosmos* ('progressive' meaning gradually gaining in difficulty rather than forwards-looking on a piece-by-piece basis), first recorded by Sándor between 1950 and 1955, well transferred in the current context, a more chiselled reading than its freer Vox successor. The real news here, Bartók-wise, is a rare 1951 recital that opens with a wildly raging *Allegro barbaro* (swifter than either its Vox or CBS successors), the Romanian Folk Dances, an extremely well-chosen recital sequence from *For Children* (which passes on the simpler pieces), the 15 *Hungarian Peasant Songs* and the tangy Suite Op 14. As always with Sándor, the playing has a direct, earthy quality to it, though subtleties abound. The other 'extra' is what was in 1987 a recently discovered and mostly effective solo piano version of the Concerto for Orchestra, which shares its disc space with the Dance Suite and the *Petite Suite* after various violin Duos – not, however,



György Sándor: his performances connect us with the composer's soul

the recording that features on the four-CD re-make of various solo works, which dates from a few years later. The only solo pieces that Sándor recorded for CBS but not for Vox are *The First Term at the Piano* and the short *Andante* for piano (originally destined for the Suite, Sz62).

Turning to the piano concertos with the Hungarian State Orchestra under Adám Fischer, the Vox/Sony comparison (the former with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra under Michael Gielen and Rolf Reinhardt on Vox Legends, with the Scherzo, Rhapsody and Sonata for two pianos and percussion) again reports a harder sound frame on the Vox recordings, vividly antiphonal this time though the older Sándor is more attentive to inner voicing. Of the three recordings of the Third Concerto (two for CBS, both included here, one for Vox), the Vox version includes the broadest *Adagio religioso*. It's also worth mentioning Sándor's excellent Vox recordings of Bartók's Baroque music transcriptions (Ciaia, Zipoli, Girolamo Frescobaldi, Muffat, Michelangelo Rossi and Marcello on Vox Musical Concepts), unrecorded by others who have tackled the principal solo piano music cycle.

Sándor's recordings of solo Bach, both 'pure' and as arranged by Busoni, Liszt and himself, are imposingly grand while among other items Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto (under Artur Rodzinski) is truly a barnstorming affair, the fugato section of the finale firing off at one hell of a lick. Once into its stride Liszt's Sonata is similarly combustible, as are the (slightly cut) *Dante Sonata*, *Rhapsodie espagnole* and First *Mephisto Waltz*. Among the Chopin items included, the F minor Fantasia sets off with something approaching breezy indifference, though when the going gets tougher, Sándor's demeanour darkens accordingly. Schumann's *Carnaval* is fairly extrovert and there's a sprightly *Papillons* whereas Brahms's inwardly searching three Intermezzi Op 117 are poetically phrased, the second of them especially.

To close where I began, when it comes to considering whether or not to purchase this admirable set (which is very well annotated by Jed Distler) Bartók is likely to prove the clincher. Vox's series remains a strong contender, but there's a problem in that some – though not many – of the original tapes were missing from Vox's archives which means that a handful of the recordings have been transferred from imperfect vinyl pressings. As to the wider picture, Zoltán Kocsis remains a benchmark. His set of the solo works features music not included by Sándor; for example, both the longer and shorter versions of the solo piano Rhapsody. Foldes, though incomplete and in mono, is often electrifying and I have a special fondness for Andreas Bach's more idiosyncratic recordings on Hänssler Classic, four volumes so far with only the fifth (*Mikrokosmos*) yet to come. But Sándor has his own unique appeal: he's well and truly 'in the zone', as they say, and the late recordings – made when he was in his early 80s and still in remarkably fine fettle – connect with the composer's very soul. **G**

THE RECORDING

György Sándor The Complete Columbia Album Collection
Sony Classical (17 discs) 19075 93882-2

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BOX-SET *Round-up*

Rob Cowan offers a personal selection of some worthwhile CD bargains

Readers who fancy trying the versicoloured world of **Telemann's** *Musique de table* (or *Tafelmusik*), with its dazzling sequence of overtures, concertos, chamber pieces and solos, are well served by

Musica Amphion under Pieter-Jan Belder (who you may recall recorded the complete run of Domenico Scarlatti's keyboard sonatas, also for Brilliant: 93546). Belder's performances are generally pleasing, if without the immediacy that Nikolaus Harnoncourt (Warner) and Reinhard Goebel (DG Archiv) brought to the same music, while the recorded sound is agreeably natural. Also included is a disc of sonatas, solos and a concerto performed by Il Rossignolo. The set comes complete with an illuminating essay by Martino Noferi.

More Telemann – overtures and the *Wassermusik* this time – appears in the context of a 10-CD mixed programme featuring the virtuoso group Zefiro: **The Baroque Collection**. This is exceptional playing by any standards. Sample disc 6, tracks 16 and 17 (from the overture TWV55:d3), the latter especially – a bold call to arms in the form of a lively gigue. Zefiro's richly textured sound stands out even among a plethora of rival recordings by similar groups. Also featured are Vivaldi bassoon concertos (Alberto Grazzi), Venetian oboe concertos (with Alfredo Bernardini; works by Albinoni, Bigaglia, Marcello, Platti, Sammartini and Vivaldi), Bach Orchestral Suites (Nos 1, 3 and 4, plus the Overtures BWV119R and BWV194R), Handel's *Music for the Royal Fireworks* (a glorious brass-dominated racket, very well captured by Arcana's engineers) and *Concerti a due core* (all three), orchestral pieces by Fasch, ensemble sonatas by Zelenka (excellent work from oboists Paolo Grazzi and Bernardini) and a gentle programme entitled 'Dresden' featuring Fasch, Quantz, Heinichen, Vivaldi, Telemann, Califano and Lotti. I'd recommend sampling Heinichen's Sonata in B flat for two oboes, bassoon and continuo. This is a most rewarding collection: I listened straight through and loved every minute.

Two sets from Alpha Classics also beg urgent attention, the first on 20 CDs featuring **Le Poème Harmonique** (with

director the lutenist Vincent Dumestre). It's a beguiling presentation of selected early music, vocal and instrumental, much of it little known. Try the catchy, warmly strumming *Una musica* that opens the album selection dedicated to Antoine Boësset, or *Folia* (with castanets) by Briçeno. Other highlights include famous settings of the *Te Deum* by Charpentier and Lully, *Leçons de ténèbres* by Couperin, two discs of works by Lalande, music by Monteverdi, programmes devoted to French courtly songs from the late 16th century, plus discs entitled 'Firenze 1616', 'Il Fásolo?' and 'Love is Strange' (works for lute consort) – and very much more. You don't need to be an expert in the sphere of early music to appreciate what's on offer here, or how utterly beguiling the performances are. This is a real treat.

The entire set is seductively moreish – you can learn so much from sampling early music from around the globe

The other recommendable Alpha Classics collection, **Le fabuleux voyage**, travels the globe with pieces from Ireland (Gaelic songs and dances of the 17th and 18th centuries), Italy ('Storie di Napoli'), France ('Aux marches du palais'), then Spain ('De vez en cuando la vida'), North Africa ('Rayon de lune'), Turkey (including music by Dufay), Asia (a programme entitled 'Paris – Istanbul – Shanghai'), the Balkans ('Tiganeasca' – very multinational, including a catchy Yiddish first track), Germany (an all-Bach 'miniatures' programme) and, to close, a programme of 17th-century dances from the British Isles. The performances, involving various skilled ensembles and soloists, are consistently engaging and the sound has a warm, intimate feel to it. The entire collection is seductively moreish and makes you realise how much is to be learnt from sampling early music from the ancient

global community. Both of these sets contain detailed track-listings and concise but useful annotations.

If the sets briefly discussed above typify, in general, the way early music is performed nowadays, Harmonia Mundi's seven-CD collection **Alfred Deller: The Voice of Purcell** harks back to the 1970s, focusing on one of the great vocal artists of the period, and I'm not restricting that accolade merely to the world of early music. To think that disc 6, 'Music for a While', which presents 13 Purcell songs (with expert instrumental accompaniments from Wieland Kuijken, William Christie and Roderick Skeaping), was recorded merely months before Deller's death in July 1979 reminds us that this peerless artist retained his vocal control and beauty of timbre virtually intact right until the end. The earliest of these recordings, *The Fairy Queen*, with the likes of Christina Clarke, Maurice Bevan and Mark Deller, dates from 1972. There as elsewhere the playing of the Deller Consort is deft and stylish, though the manner of performance is audibly of its time (not that I'm complaining). Civilised is what I'd call it. Other works included are *The Indian Queen* and *King Arthur*, and a programme of chants and anthems. This excellent set ideally supplements various vintage Deller releases that Decca Eloquence have been putting out over the past year or so, 2019 having marked the 40th anniversary of the singer's passing. 

THE RECORDINGS

Telemann Musica Amphion / Belder;

Il Rossignolo

Brilliant Classics © ⑤ 96046

The Baroque Collection Zefiro / Bernardini

Arcana © ⑩ A202

Le Poème Harmonique

Le Poème Harmonique / Dumestre *gtr/lute*

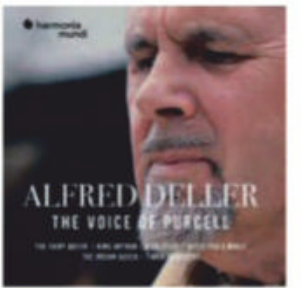
Alpha © (20 discs) ALPHA568

Le fabuleux voyage Various artists

Alpha © ⑩ ALPHA435

Alfred Deller: The Voice of Purcell

Harmonia Mundi © ⑦ HMX290 4000/6



REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings



Rostrum rarities

Of all the conductors active in Germany during the Nazi era, two stood out as representing the epitome of German late Romanticism: Furtwängler (most famously in Berlin) and Abendroth (in Leipzig), each having conducted Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* at Bayreuth in 1943; in fact, excellent recordings survive of both interpretations. Profil's imposing 10-CD selection of **Hermann Abendroth** performances attests to a very personal style, extremely volatile (as in Beethoven's Symphony No 7 with the Warsaw Philharmonic) or sonorous and infinitely flexible (most notably in Bruckner's Symphonies Nos 4, 5, 7 – recorded shortly before the conductor's death in 1956 – and 9, the Fifth being the most compelling). Brahms is represented by Symphonies Nos 1 and 3, the *Tragic Overture* and the *Haydn* Variations and Beethoven also by Symphonies Nos 3, 6 and 9. The version of the *Choral* here, from Berlin in 1952, is quite different from a 1951 Czech performance once put out by Tahra as part of an all-Beethoven Abendroth collection (TAH129/31) and which was distinctive above all for the glorious singing of the Czech chorus. Both are profoundly Furtwänglerian in concept. Another highlight is Beethoven's Violin Concerto with David Oistrakh (1952, also included in the Tahra set), an often serene reading in which violinist, orchestra and conductor seem utterly at one. In general, Abendroth's performances call on a tried and trusted tradition, using it to fly rather than to stay put. Recording quality throughout is in the main acceptable; for example, Bruckner's Fifth sounds virtually identical to the edition of the same performance once issued by Berlin Classics (0092802BC).

Abendroth may not have had **Wilhelm Furtwängler's** recreative flair but in terms of intensity there are times when his performances draw close to rivalling those of his fated contemporary, especially in the music of Bruckner. Needless to say, as always with historic performances, there's the complex issue of textual editions. In Bruckner's Fourth, most significantly, Abendroth uses the 1881 version

(aka 1878/80) as edited by Robert Haas (1936), whereas Furtwängler with the Vienna Philharmonic opts for the significantly doctored, at times even overblown 1888 version as revised by Ferdinand Loewe and edited by Albert Gutmann (1889). (As ever, I acknowledge John F Berky's online Bruckner discography.) Furtwängler's Decca recording – one of two from October 1951, both with the Vienna Philharmonic and both included in DG's set of the conductor's complete DG and Decca recordings – has recently appeared in an excellent transfer from Pristine Audio which significantly bolsters the dynamic range of the original tape. Similarly, Pristine and producer Andrew Rose open up the sound of Furtwängler's admirable April 1951 Berlin Philharmonic Cairo broadcast of the Seventh. Not that the DG transfer is inadequate – you can always, after all, use tone controls to alter or boost the sound yourself; it's just that Rose does it for you, and more.

The sheer depth and presence of Rose's 'ambient' mastering is remarkable

Fritz Busch is best remembered nowadays for his pioneering and extremely stylish shellac records of Mozart operas employing forces from Glyndebourne (of which he was music director). But Busch's skill as an inspired interpreter of key orchestral works is often overlooked, a fact confirmed by the precious few studio and broadcast recordings that have been passed down to us. Pristine has paid Busch an inestimable service by issuing numerous such recordings, including a Brahms package (forthright performances from New York, Copenhagen and Vienna of Symphonies Nos 1, 2 and 4, plus the *Tragic Overture* and *Nänie* on PASC570) and, even more remarkable, a live programme of works by Berlioz, Reger and Schumann with the North West German RSO, Hamburg, recorded in 1951. First up is a kaleidoscopic performance of Berlioz's *Benvenuto Cellini* Overture, its impact much

enhanced by Rose's 'ambient' mastering: the sheer depth and presence of the sound is remarkable. You could easily be listening to genuine stereo. Reger's *Hiller* Variations are played with affection and imagination, especially the beautiful fifth and 11th, while the closing Fugue is imbued with both humour and a keen sense of momentum. However, there's a problem in that the original tape has deteriorated so badly that Rose was obliged to replace Busch's versions of Vars 7-10 with another 1951 recording, this time a fairly well-known commercial issue featuring the Berlin Philharmonic under Paul van Kempen (soon to be reissued by Eloquence in the context of van Kempen's complete Philips recordings). It's a good match, though van Kempen's more virtuoso performance has a cleaner edge to it than does Busch's. As to Schumann's Fourth Symphony, Busch offers a performance of great originality which, although not always entirely tidy, is elastic in its handling of tempo relations and dynamics, the Scherzo beefy and hard-driven, the uplifting transition to the finale a fair match for Furtwängler – even more striking, in fact, being noble and broad, with powerfully crescendoing brass and timpani, and novel swirling string figurations at 1'27". The first movement includes its exposition repeat, the finale doesn't. If your previous experience of Busch is restricted to Mozart operas, you're in for a revelation.

THE RECORDINGS



Hermann Abendroth:
The Great Orchestral Works
Beethoven, Brahms, Bruckner etc
Oistrakh v/n MDR Leipzig RSO et al
Profil © 10 PH19000



Furtwängler
Conducts Bruckner
Symphonies Nos 4 and 7
VPO; BPO / Furtwängler
Pristine Audio © 2 PASC580

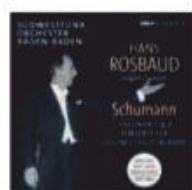


Busch: The Hamburg Concert
Berlioz, Reger, Schumann
NDR SO / Busch
Pristine Audio © PASC576

Rosbaud in Schumann

SWR's Hans Rosbaud series continues with Schumann, opening with memorable performances of Symphonies Nos 1 and 4, the *Larghetto* of No 1 broadly drawn and balanced with great care, No 4 charged with drama (counterpoint is tellingly traced in the slow introduction), the Scherzo and finale especially taut. Disc 1 ends with a compelling *Julius Caesar* overture, and disc 2, the set's true hub, has remarkable performances of the Cello (Pierre Fournier) and Violin (Henryk Szeryng) Concertos, the former also available on Archipel, the latter originally put out by SWR on a Szeryng album. As ever, Rosbaud brings conversational support without ever barging to the foreground (try the end of the first movement of the Cello Concerto from 11'25", reaching to the slow movement). Fournier seems utterly at home in this music, and Szeryng plus Rosbaud amounts to a true meeting of minds. I've never heard a more moving account of this work: every nook and cranny is explored, and the music's deeply ambivalent nature truly touches the heart. In the Piano Concerto, Annie Fischer fans the flames, more so than a marmoreal Claudio Arrau (under Ernest Bour, also on SWR). Which reminds me, I do hope that SWR will launch an edition devoted to Bour, Rosbaud's near equal.

THE RECORDING



Hans Rosbaud
Conducts Schumann
 Szeryng *vn* Fournier *vc* Fischer *pf*
 SWR SO Baden-Baden / Rosbaud
 SWR Classic (B) (3) SWR19085CD

Busch Quartet post-war

Having last month welcomed Pristine's Beethoven sonatas by Busch and Serkin, I'm equally keen on this release featuring the last incarnation of the Busch Quartet performing in post-war Germany, with Adolf and his cellist brother Hermann flanking Bruno Straumann and Hugo Gottesmann. Although Adolf was not in the best of health, his playing remains highly distinctive, his leadership – driving forwards, holding back or toying with numerous dynamics and nuances – as charismatic as ever. My only regret is that for the great B flat Quartet he opted to end the work with the lighter rewrite finale rather than the gnarled but imposingly conclusive *Grosse Fuge*. We already have this version as recorded by the Busch a few years earlier for Columbia, but still, the performance here is sonically superior and almost the equal, musically, of its predecessor, with only the



The great soprano Lotte Lehmann – here as Tosca – is caught in her prime on a new Marston set

Alla danza tedesca momentarily sounding a little muddled. The Cavatina is, as before, a miracle of poise and highly charged emotion. The other late quartet here is the C sharp minor, Op 131, whose opening *Adagio ma non troppo e molto espressivo* is beautifully sustained, and the deathly quiet transition to the *Allegro molto vivace* is truly inspired. Only the Mendelssohnian Scherzo is marred by a momentary technical glitch. In Op 59 No 3 in C, here as in the 1930s, Adolf and his brother commiserate via the mournfully exotic melody in the second movement, Adolf weaving a typically seamless line, Hermann plucking a rich-toned pizzicato. The earlier recording of this movement has always been a favourite Beethoven track of mine, and the new one virtually levels with it for quality. Op 18 No 1 is not quite as intense as in the pre-war recording, but it's unmistakably characteristic, as is Mendelssohn's busy Capriccio, also included here. These performances truly justify the epithet 'great'.

THE RECORDING



Busch Quartet
Plays Beethoven (G)
 Pristine Audio
 (E) (2) PACM105

Lehmann at her peak

Ward Marston has captured Lotte Lehmann's voice in its prime, arranging these recordings with love and expertise and handsomely boxing them with exhaustive annotations. Hers was perhaps the most seductive lyric soprano of her generation, certainly in German repertory – witness her 1935 Vienna recording of *Die Walküre*'s Act 1 with Lauritz Melchior. Earlier than those benchmark Wagner sessions, these Odeon recordings report a voice that is as exquisite in its expressive properties as it is in its reach and agility. One of the many highlights is Korngold's highly emotive aria 'Ich ging zu ihm' (*Das Wunder der Heliane*), an uncompromising hymn to love. On the following track you hear Lehmann poignantly speaking 'So war meine Mutter' from Lehár's *Eva*, then, in addition to the many opera excerpts (Strauss, Puccini, Mozart, Wagner and so on, including a rapturously beautiful Liebestod), there are the songs. Schumann's *Frauenliebe und -leben* is a sequence of unforgettable

Lieder, just eight of many in this Marston set that are lightly orchestrated, often by skilful hands. Although Lehmann later made a memorable recording of the Schumann with Bruno Walter at the piano (recently reissued on Sony), this 1928 chamber ensemble version is vocally sweeter, lighter and less effortful. Numerous hymns with organ are warmly and sincerely voiced, operetta ensemble pieces feature (among others) Richard Tauber, and there's a well-chosen selection of broadcasts. The transfers are first-rate, the originals well focused if bass-light, while Marston's method manages virtually to dispense with distracting surface hiss without impinging on the actual recordings.

THE RECORDING



Lotte Lehmann: Odeon
Electrical Recordings,
1927-1933
 Marston (M) (6) 56004-2
marstonrecords.com

Classics RECONSIDERED



Mark Pullinger
and **Hugo Shirley**
reappraise Zubin Mehta's
starry 1972 recording
of *Turandot* for Decca



Puccini

Turandot

Sols; John Alldis Choir; LPO / Zubin Mehta

Decca

The casting here may come as a surprise. *Turandot*, the icy princess, is hardly a part one would readily associate with Sutherland, while the idea of matching her against so formidable a Liù as Caballé predictably set tongues wagging before the actual recording took place. There is only one scene where they actually confront one another, and as I can bear witness myself, the actual session on that day could hardly have been happier with Sutherland rightly ceding first place to the character who at this point at least takes centre stage. Even after that I was not absolutely convinced that the total result of this unexpected casting would be right. Would Sutherland have the necessary steel? Would

there be enough contrast between her and Caballé? Would the temperament of each singer allow the necessary differentiation of character? Sutherland certainly has the natural weight of voice to cope with the part of the icy princess. We often forget just how big the voice is. Where Callas's *Turandot*, in some ways the most searching ever recorded, is essentially a product of the gramophone, Sutherland's could readily be transferred to the stage. True, the voice has far less steel than Nilsson's (Leinsdorf and Molinari-Pradelli sets), but as caught on these vivid and impressive discs this provides a portrait of the heroine quite distinct from any previous version on record, one that inspires new responses from a character who too readily for comfort takes on the role of a man-eating female with no hint of chink in armour, until suddenly by a wave of the wand in Act 3 all is

sweetness and light ... This performance sets the seal on Pavarotti's expanded reputation. He deliberately uses a tougher, more incisive tone appropriate for a more dramatic part. The top A on his final Act 1 cry of 'Turandot!' is thrillingly trumpet-like, whereas 'Non piangere, Liù' brings a beautifully judged performance which comes neatly between the rival offerings of Björling and Corelli – tender on the one hand and full of implied passion. There is no shoulder-heaving, but every word tells. So too in 'Nessun dorma', a heroic outburst rather than a meditation, though earlier 'il mio nome nessun saprà' comes out in a charmingly confidential way. The final climax ('con anima' as marked) ends in a gloriously held top B flat to set the ears rattling ... The Decca recording is more brilliant and more analytical than either of the principal rivals. **Edward Greenfield (9/73)**

Mark Pullinger Pavarotti sings 'Nessun dorma'! Since that famous 1990 World Cup concert with the Three Tenors, Luciano has been closely associated in people's minds with Calaf's Act 3 aria from *Turandot*, yet when this complete recording of the opera was made, in 1972, he had yet to sing the role on stage. Joan Sutherland was in the same boat in the title-role, but she never performed the ice princess on stage. Quite a lot of EG's very lengthy *Gramophone* review (only a small portion of which is reproduced above) deals with what an unlikely cast this is. It surely must have really surprised people at the time.

Hugo Shirley Indeed, and I can imagine it could still surprise people today, not least those who equate the *bel canto* repertoire that became Sutherland's speciality with smaller canary-esque

voices. The fact that this is very much a studio affair is underlined, too, by some other casting: Peter Pears as the Emperor; Decca's star bass, Nicolai Ghiaurov, as Timur; Tom Krause, as EG notes, feeling like a bit of an interloper between two *comprimario* veterans as Ping. That original review spends a lot of time rationalising the result as an important and valid contrast to more traditional recordings featuring Birgit Nilsson and Maria Callas. Do you think it protests too much?

MP Just a little. It's ironic that he calls Callas's *Turandot* 'a product of the gramophone' when she did actually perform the role on stage (La Fenice, 1948). I suppose by the early 1970s Sutherland had become so identified with *bel canto* repertoire that it's easy to forget that before her 'overnight success' in

Lucia di Lammermoor at Covent Garden, London, in 1959 she was singing the likes of Amelia in *Un ballo in maschera* and Eva in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. It was a huge voice. What do you think of her *Turandot*? And how does she hold up next to someone like Nilsson?

HS Well, Nilsson is of course a very different sort of *Turandot* – and arguably in a category all her own. Sutherland's perhaps closer to the earlier Decca *Turandot*, Inge Borkh. But I find her really very impressive. There's a slight cloudiness and a hint of droop at the start of 'In questa reggia', which makes you fear some of the mannerisms and faults familiar from other recordings, but she then hits her stride magnificently, demonstrating impressive power and also plenty of temperament – and more than the usual number of consonants.



From left: Ghiaurov, Pavarotti, Caballé, Sutherland and Krause recording at Kingsway Hall, London, August 1972

MP There's certainly plenty of bite at the climactic 'quel grido e quella morte!' I agree that her Turandot is closer to Borkh than Nilsson. And after Calaf's kiss, she melts in a very human way, which is not always the case with Franco Alfano's ending, which can turn it into a brutal contest of decibels between soprano and tenor.

HS Dramatically, it ends up being entirely convincing for me as a recorded performance, which must in part also be down to the fact that it's Zubin Mehta conducting. At least, it would have been a very different affair if Richard Bonyngue had been in charge!

MP A fair point, although I find Mehta revels in the strange beauty of the score but doesn't have the same ferocious drive as Erich Leinsdorf or Francesco Molinari-Pradelli, both of whom recorded with the Rome Opera House. The latter is a good six minutes swifter than Mehta. *Turandot* is a savage opera and at times I want a little more brutality than Mehta and the LPO are prepared to offer.

HS Yes, the conducting does often feel less the product of the theatre than that of the studio: expansive, almost symphonic, in the same tradition as Herbert von Karajan's contemporaneous *La bohème*, also with Pavarotti.

MP How does Pavarotti's Calaf square up to the challenge, do you think?

HS Well, in some ways simply noting that it's Pavarotti in his glorious prime says it all. He pours out that golden tone with a naturalness and an apparent ease that no one, really, can match. I suppose it comes down to personal preference, though: whether you want a Calaf who's stepped up from Rodolfo or across from the more dramatic Verdi territory. And while I'd never want to be without the big thrills of Franco Corelli and Co, Pavarotti fits into the context of this recording superbly. What's your take?

MP Who can resist Pavarotti when he sings like this? It's a gorgeous, honeyed, sunny sound. Whether it's right for Calaf is another matter. When he went on to make his role debut (San Francisco, 1977), he was asked how a singer knows when they are ready for a new role. 'The day after the performance!' was his instant response. It wasn't a role he sang much (he appeared in Zeffirelli's gargantuan staging at the Met Opera, New York, in 1997), but he justified singing it by citing Jussi Björling as a predecessor on disc. A valid argument, I think, although Björling never attempted the role on stage. Ultimately, Pavarotti used to describe himself as a lyric voice and claimed he would never swap Nemorino (*L'elisir d'amore*) for Calaf. When he made his stage debut, he sang opposite Montserrat Caballé, who switched from Liù on disc to Turandot. What do you make of her as the slave girl for Mehta?

HS I'm less won over by Caballé. She does her thing superbly – those long lines, those floated *pianissimos* – but it strikes me as a touch arch and indulgent when compared with the honesty that we get from Sutherland and Pavarotti. She doesn't let the side down, exactly, but give me Renata Tebaldi (opposite Borkh or Nilsson in the studio) or Anna Moffo (live with Nilsson and Corelli) any day. Maybe you feel differently, though?

MP 'Arch and indulgent' sums it up perfectly. It's a lovely sound, but very ... calculated. I was once told a story about friction during recording when Sutherland sat in on one of Caballé's sessions and dared to criticise. The spat was eventually smoothed over when Joan presented Montserrat with a bouquet. 'Ah, flowers for the diva!' exclaimed Caballé. 'No, flowers *from* the diva!' replied Sutherland, tartly! Perhaps it's apocryphal, but it's a delicious anecdote.

HS Ha! And it's telling that EG is at pains to point out how harmoniously they got on when he attended a session, as if we'd naturally expect them to be at each other's throats. What about the other singers?

MP The rest of the casting is sumptuous, particularly Ghiaurov as a noble Timur. I think Pears as the Emperor Altoun is a stroke of genius. I wonder what his partner, Benjamin Britten, thought?

HS Perhaps a reader with access to the letters can tell us! Pears certainly radiates a special mixture of nobility and melancholy, and you really sense how he just wants the whole fatal quiz show thing to come to an end. And speaking of coming to an end ... what's our conclusion? Is it a deserved classic? For me, it certainly still holds up very well – sounding as vivid as ever.

MP I've always enjoyed the way Decca recorded opera, and it still sounds wonderfully fresh. It wouldn't be the first recording I'd pull down from the shelf – Nilsson and Corelli slugging it out in Rome (under Molinari-Pradelli) does it for me. But there's much to marvel at here, not least Pavarotti's gleaming 'Nessun dorma'.

HS I agree: for real fire, fireworks and a more direct sense of the theatre one has to look elsewhere. But this is certainly a classic of its type: a superb studio recording in unsurpassed sound that's still highly recommended. **G**

Books



Richard Whitehouse reads about Weinberg and his contemporaries:

'Elphick is right to reference Aleksander Raskatov as in many respects the closest Weinberg has yet had to a successor'



Lindsay Kemp on a Bach study full of unexpected insights:

'Who knew that Picander, librettist of the St Matthew Passion, had a sideline in ribald poems for reading out at weddings?'

Music behind the Iron Curtain

Weinberg and his Polish Contemporaries

By Daniel Elphick

Cambridge University Press, HB, 318pp, £75

ISBN 987-1-108-49367-3



The expanding Weinberg discography has been among the most striking such occurrences these past

two decades, making it inevitable that the composer's bibliography should lag well behind. Concerning English publications, David Fanning's monograph *Mieczysław Weinberg: In Search of Freedom* (Wolke, 2/11) has proved invaluable, with a more inclusive study co-authored by Fanning and Michelle Assay promised from Toccata Press. For the present, this compact and perceptive volume by Daniel Elphick provides much more than a makeweight.

Weinberg aficionados may have encountered Elphick through his doctoral thesis on the string quartets (worth downloading from the University of Manchester Library). The present book also takes in a biographical overview and discussion of the specifically Polish context from which Weinberg emerged. Elphick is for the most part successful in dovetailing them so a cohesive course is sustained: there may be little in his assessment of modern Polish history to offset previous accounts, but the author marshals his information without undue ideological bias.

When it comes to the actual quartets Elphick proves a more than reliable guide, subjecting each of the 17 in this cycle (plus the original versions of the first two quartets) to pertinent scrutiny in terms of its place in both Weinberg's evolution and that of the string quartet in Poland itself. Technically speaking, his approach is analytical if not abstrusely so (though some prior knowledge of, for example, the theories of Hugo Riemann is beneficial). Any failings here stem not from the

accuracy of his observations as from some inconsistency in the way analytical concepts have been applied; anyone expecting a balanced overall assessment of these quartets may be left feeling a little short-changed by Elphick's shifting perspective as regards the intrinsic quality of each piece, even allowing for the changing historical context.

If this is indeed a failing, it is likely because of the decision to relate Weinberg's quartets to those of his Polish colleagues – problematic in that, while his formative years were spent in and around Warsaw, the composer subsequently moved so far from this orbit in creative as well as geographical terms that his solitary return there in 1966 saw both him and his music marginalised in the antagonism between an overbearing Soviet establishment and dismissive Polish avant-garde. Elphick's contention that the influence of Polish literature on Weinberg receded rapidly from this point onwards is certainly fair, yet that of Polish music had arguably been in retreat at least from the time he settled in Moscow more than two decades previously – in the process making Weinberg a 'Polish composer' in historical terms only.

This is not to suggest the comparison between Weinberg's quartets with those of his Polish forebears, contemporaries and successors is by any means fruitless. The presence of Szymanowski is writ large on the teenager's First Quartet, and if the creative exchange with Shostakovich dominates Weinberg's quartets from the mid-1940s, Elphick's pointing up of similarities in style and substance with those of Grażyna Bacewicz is productive in itself and relevant to a composer whose own output now receives greater prominence. Analogies with the quartet by Tadeusz Baird are more tenuous, and that by Lutosławski is tangential at best, while the presence (however much in passing) of Penderecki next to the virtual omission of Panufnik or Górecki raises issues as to those actual criteria for inclusion in the first instance.

Weinberg's later years are better served in this respect. The composer would likely have been nonplussed by the post-minimalist uniformity of Aleksander Lawson's quartets, but he would surely have endorsed the combative nature of Eugeniusz Knapik's only contribution or ironic subvention of quartet 'norms' in the music of Paweł Szymański. Above all, the quartets (15 to date) by Krzysztof Meyer are linked with Weinberg on grounds of an enduring friendship and compatibility of idiom as makes this among the most significant such cycles in the post-war period. How right Elphick was, moreover, to reference Aleksander Raskatov's *Monk's Music*, and not merely as a belated *in memoriam* but also as a masterly addition to the genre of the string quartet by one who is in many respects the closest Weinberg has yet had to a successor.

Production values are typical of CUP's Music in Context series as a whole, with appendices devoted to works banned after the Zhdanov decree of February 1948, the programme for the 1966 Warsaw Autumn Festival and Weinberg's movingly gauche address to 'Polish Friends' in 1969 an undoubted enhancement. Elphick should still consider publishing his study of the string quartets (unusually and engagingly readable for a PhD thesis!), but the present book is certainly a welcome and timely publication that marks Weinberg's centenary. **Richard Whitehouse**

Sex, Death and Minuets

By David Yearsley

University of Chicago Press, HB, 336pp, £34

ISBN 978-0-226-61770-1



I can't pretend the title looks promising. You half expect the subtitle to be 'the notebook that changed music forever'. But this is not some journo's sensational page-turner but a serious study by a professor of music



in Yearsley plunges, his considerable erudition, open-mindedness and imaginative intelligence enabling him to probe a whole range of subjects concerning the role of women in 18th-century German family life, the musical profession and society in general.

We are drawn into some fascinating and often surprising areas: weddings and married life – not all editions of the Notebooks have dared to include the poem copied into it by Anna Magdalena herself, which Yearsley's impressive knowledge of 18th-century German slang shows to be somewhat focused on the sexual act (and who knew that Picander, librettist of the *St Matthew Passion*, had a sideline in ribald poems for reading out at weddings?); Lutheran attitudes to death, not least to bereavement following the death of children, which Sebastian and Anna Magdalena suffered on no fewer than seven occasions; female organists (you may be surprised to learn that there were some); the

seductive allure of coffee and hooped skirts; what to do with an unmarried daughter such as the one in the 'Coffee' Cantata (Yearsley plausibly imagines this sung by the Bachs' own unmarried daughter Catharina Dorothea); and the cruelly degraded state of widowhood, which Anna Magdalena experienced for 10 years with little support from her successful sons and stepsons. To finish, there is a short chapter on the continuing life-history of the Notebooks' most famous entry, the Minuet in G, which even got turned into a pop song in the 1960s, a decade before it was discovered not to be by Bach.

I cannot help feeling that Yearsley's attempts to find some of these aspects reflected in the fabric of Bach's compositions, for all his musical understanding, are a little randomly subjective. But it seems unlikely that any other overall approach to Bach biography could have yielded such a rich crop of unexpected insights as there are in this book. And the final pleasure of it is that, for all its learnedness, Yearsley's writing style is eminently readable, witty and entertaining. **Lindsay Kemp**

A new study places the music of Mieczysław Weinberg in the context of his Polish contemporaries

at Cornell University, with nowhere even a fleeting glimpse of that tiresome joke about how Bach must have been a passionate man because he had 20 children. Indeed, when you consider that David Yearsley's previous books include one entitled *Bach's Feet: The Organ Pedals in European Culture*, you begin to realise that what we might actually have here is an academic with a gentle and inquisitive sense of fun.

And so it proves. Yearsley's project is to take on the task of extrapolating as much as seems reasonably possible from the evidence of the two bound manuscript music books Bach presented to his second wife, Anna Magdalena Wilcke: the first in 1722, perhaps as a first-anniversary gift; and the second in 1725. The books contain keyboard pieces (not all easy, and not all by Sebastian), songs, chorales, exercises, even a fragment of an organ piece – an assortment which has traditionally been interpreted as Bach 'instructing' his wife, 16 years younger than him, in playing the keyboard, in singing, and to a certain extent in composing. And from there, as Yearsley points out, the image has been allowed to grow of Anna Magdalena as

the loving and homely spouse, diligently and modestly supporting Bach and looking after the family while he gets on with being great. One of the earliest chapters in this book is a fascinating survey of the industry of fictionalised depictions of such a relationship from the 1850s onwards, the most influentially disinformative of which was Esther Meynell's *The Little Chronicle of Magdalena Bach* of 1925, which became so ubiquitous that many who should have known better – especially in the light of the author's own disclaimer – came to treat it as if it were a real document.

Yearsley effortlessly subverts the consequences of this 'Magdalena mania' with a simple paradigm shift. Anna Magdalena, he points out, was a professional singer before she married Bach, one good enough to be employed on a high-ish salary at the Cöthen court. Why, then, must we assume that her musical life was entirely in thrall to that of her husband? And given that much of the manuscript is in her expert musical hand, why can it not have been 'curated' as much by her as by him? Once these questions have been asked, the possibilities open up like parting waves, and

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Handel's *Dixit Dominus*

The exuberance of Handel's early choral masterpiece has been subject to a variety of approaches on disc, finds **Richard Wigmore**

From Dürer to Goethe and beyond, German artists have repeatedly succumbed to the intoxicating lure of the south, in imagination or reality. In the 18th century, Italy was the magnet for any northern musician bent on a career in opera. Never short of self-confidence, in the autumn of 1706 the 21-year-old Handel duly set out from Hamburg for 'the land where lemon trees bloom'. Probably travelling via Florence, he arrived in Rome in the winter or early spring of 1707 and quickly acquired influential patrons. The first major work he composed there – and the earliest dated Handel autograph – was the setting of Psalm 109 (110 in the Authorised Version) *Dixit Dominus*, signed 'G.F. Hendel / 1707 / li ... d'aprile. / Roma'.

We can only speculate what prompted the Saxon to produce music for the Roman Catholic liturgy. We don't even know when or where it was first performed. But it is at least possible that *Dixit Dominus* was sung, along with other Handel psalms and motets, in the Vespers feasts of Our Lady of Mount Carmel celebrated in the little church of Santa Maria di Monte Santo in July 1707.

Italy liberated Handel, as it liberated so many northerners. In Rome his music, grounded in the Teutonic contrapuntal tradition, acquired a new boldness, exuberance and melodic allure; and none of Handel's works, from any period, is bolder or more exuberant than *Dixit Dominus*, in effect a sumptuous concerto grosso for five-part choir, five vocal soloists and strings. From the stupendous opening chorus, incorporating a plainsong cantus firmus, this is the music of a young genius

in full bloom, determined to dazzle the Roman cognoscenti and push his choir to the limits of virtuosity.

Despite raw edges, Handel's grand manner is already fully formed, not least in the still-shocking harmonic coups of 'Juravit Dominus'. He never wrote a more graphic descriptive chorus than the pounding 'Conquassabit' – a Handelian take on Monteverdi's *stile concitato* – or a more sheerly exhilarating fugue than the final 'Et in saecula saeculorum'. While the solo arias, for alto ('Virgam virtutis') and soprano ('Tecum principium'), are less distinctive, the soprano duet 'De torrente', with its chains of bittersweet suspensions, would be a desert island shortlist piece for many Handel lovers.

EARLY (BRITISH) DIXITS ON DISC

Dixit was a slow starter on record. For more than a decade the 1965 recording from King's College, Cambridge, directed by **David Willcocks**, led the field. The women soloists, especially Janet Baker, singing with her trademark conviction and firmness of line, are excellent. Yet the performance, very much of its time, is too politely Anglican, jogging amiably where it should bound and soar. Add the all-too-vibrant strings and an irritatingly jangly harpsichord and you have a dubious trip down memory lane.

Anglican decorum, plus anachronistically fruity strings, also dogs the later King's recording under **Stephen Cleobury**. While tempos are now a notch livelier, trim and elegant choral singing in this music is not enough. The words of the psalm, by turns pugnacious and jubilant, count for little, and both soprano soloists sound strained.



The high point of the performance is Michael Chance's beautifully shaded 'Virgam virtutis'. Which surely can't be right in what is overwhelmingly a choral festival.

Predictably, there is far more dramatic impetus – and more sheer volume – in the performance made a decade earlier by **John Eliot Gardiner's** Monteverdi Choir, whose singing set new standards for mingled power, precision and athleticism. On the downside are over-juicy strings ('period' instruments, though you might not guess it) and a clanging harpsichord



Rome's Piazza del Popolo painted by Michelangelo Pacetti (1793-1855): the second building from the right is the church of Santa Maria di Monte Santo, where Handel's *Dixit Dominus* was possibly performed in July 1717

whose trills and twiddles add only nuisance value. The solo sopranos, both fine singers, are too fulsome in 'De torrente'. Gardiner's tempos – above all in the solo-choral drama of 'Dominus a dextris tuis' – tend to be steady. Yet he vindicates them with his rock-solid rhythms and unerring feeling for the work's architecture, each choral movement building inevitably to its climax.

'Plods' and 'chugs' were recurrent jottings as I listened to the mid-1980s performance from Drottningholm Baroque under **Anders Öhrwall**. Unfair, perhaps, though not by much. Too

often the music just 'happens'. Again, the highlight is 'Virgam virtutis', sung with glowing depth of tone by the young Anne Sophie von Otter.

With the period-instrument movement in full spate, *Dixit* enjoyed something of a boom from the late '80s onwards. With the scholar Graham Dixon, **Andrew Parrott** presented the psalm in the context of a Vespers service, recreating what may have been sung at the Carmelite church in Rome in July 1707, complete with introductory plainchant. There are rough moments here; and the singers can be

flustered by some of Parrott's tempos. The first soprano soloist, Jill Feldman, sounds constricted in 'Tecum principium'. But with livelier tempos than any recording to date, Parrott and his 24-strong chorus, with orchestra to match, vividly catch the music's exuberant abandon – from the springy, athletic opening chorus to a final fugue that goes like the wind, yet never loses clarity or shape.

Without matching Parrott for speed, **Simon Preston** and the all-male Westminster Abbey Choir, in superb form, are at least his equal in drama. Evidently



'Slimmed-down choice': Lionel Meunier and Vox Luminis give a convincing chamber performance

1987 was a vintage year for Westminster trebles; and the tenors provide a spine-tingling moment in their high entry (at 'in dies irae') in 'Dominus a dextris tuis'. Underpinned by a lithe organ continuo, the strings are supple and dynamically sensitive. You are also aware that the text of Psalm 109 – which has prompted widely differing interpretations – is often unpleasantly, aggressively triumphalist. No recording up to this point matches Preston's stabbing staccato at 'Et non poenitebit eum' ('And the Lord will not repent') or the vicious hammer-blows of 'Conquassabit'. At the other end of the spectrum, Arleen Auger and Lynne

Dawson entwine exquisitely in the assuaging 'De torrente' – a performance to cherish.

From the close of the decade, the first of two recordings by **Harry Christophers** and The Sixteen is crisp, polished and unfailingly euphonious. The opening and closing movements dance agreeably. But that's not quite enough. It all seems too safe and comfortable, redolent, again, of Anglican choir stalls. Lynne Dawson, a lovely Baroque singer, sounds coolly impassive in 'Tecum principium'. Christophers had partly rethought his interpretation, for the better, when he re-recorded *Dixit* in 2009. There is

now something urgent at stake in the opening chorus, delivered with panache at high speed. I also like the mini-organ concerto that enlivens the beginning of the 'Gloria' – very much in Handel's spirit, this. The beautifully matched pair of Grace Davidson and Elin Manahan Thomas bring a touching innocence and purity to 'De torrente', enhanced by apt touches of ornamentation.

Among recordings from the '90s and early 2000s, an uneventful jogtrot of a performance from Camerata Vocal Freiburg under Winfried Toll (Ars Musici) can be instantly discarded, even with the young Dorothea Röschmann as soprano soloist. Uniquely, **The Scholars Baroque Ensemble** present *Dixit* as chamber music, with the five singers doubling as 'chorus' and one-to-a-part strings. It's bright, nimble, well sung and played: enjoyable in its way but inevitably short on sonic thrills. With just five singers, you miss not only the solo-*tutti* contrasts but the Handelian thunderbolt of 'Juravit Dominus' and the awe-inspiring implacability of 'Conquassabit'.

In his largely positive review of **Marc Minkowski's** recording with Les Musiciens du Louvre, Stanley Sadie feared there were 'moments where you feel it's close to being a bit of a scramble'. The operative word is 'close'. True, the opening chorus, all tumbling eagerness, rather lacks gravitas. But for theatrical energy this performance has few equals, whether in the excited chatter of 'Tu es sacerdos', sounding like a Bachian *turba* chorus, or the remorselessly driven 'Conquassabit' – a graphic sense here of the Almighty's legions charging into battle. The final fugue has a corybantic abandon. 'Tecum principium', gracefully sung by the bell-toned Annick Massis, here becomes a springy minuet. Massis combines with Magdalena Kožená in a rapt, inward 'De torrente', with the men's chant properly held to *pianissimo*. The effect is magical.

Using what sounds like a smaller choir, **John Eliot Gardiner's** 1998 recording has

A GALLIC SLANT

Musiciens du Louvre / Marc Minkowski

Archiv (E) 459 627-2AH

Ever a risk-taker, Minkowski directs his Musiciens du Louvre in a performance of extremes, ranging from a brutally aggressive 'Conquassabit' to a 'De torrente' of spellbinding inwardness. Provocative, perhaps, but always compelling.



THE SLIMMED-DOWN CHOICE

Vox Luminis / Lionel Meunier

Alpha (E) ALPHA370

Vindicating the use of chamber forces, Meunier and Vox Luminis combine infectious dancing energy, close contrapuntal dialoguing and a vivid sense of drama. The solo sopranos entwine with celestial purity in 'De torrente'.



A CLOSE SECOND

Nuova Musica / David Bates

Harmonia Mundi (E) HMU80 7587

A performance of bold contrasts and exciting presence. The crack forces of La Nuova Musica balance Old Testament *terribilità* with subtle and sensitive shaping. Topped by notably pure sopranos, the fresh-toned chorus is second to none.



most of the same qualities as his earlier version, plus leaner, tighter playing from his period band. From the moment the altos intone the opening words, you know that this is not a Deity to mess with. For collective virtuosity the Monteverdi Choir are unbeatable. No other chorus in this survey produces so much unforced sonority from such modest forces. Have the Lord's enemies ever been dispatched with such ferocity in the hurtling scales of 'implebit ruinas'? At times – say, at the end of the final fugue – Gardiner's sophisticated shaping of the music can teeter into fussiness. And while his soloists, drawn from the choir, as Handel's probably were, sing pleasantly enough, none lingers in the memory.

DIXIT GOES CONTINENTAL

Until the millennium, British groups seemed to have a virtual monopoly on *Dixit*. Then the net widened, fruitfully. In their 2003 recording the youthful-sounding Balthasar Neumann Choir under **Thomas Hengelbrock** have few rivals in devil-may-care flamboyance. Propelled by a pair of strumming theorbos – a tangy sonority throughout – the opening and closing choruses quiver with barely contained excitement. Rests are elongated for rhetorical effect. The pure-toned soprano soloists, again drawn from the choir, entwine ethereally in 'De torrente'. I didn't care much for the rather hooty countertenor here, though you could argue, I suppose, that the unusually rapid and restless 'Virgam virtutis' reflects the less than emollient text ('The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion ...') better than more lyrical performances.

Emmanuelle Haïm and her Concert d'Astrée promised more than they delivered. Natalie Dessay – an obvious star draw – and Karine Deshayes blend beautifully in a ravishing 'De torrente'. But I don't warm to Dessay's wilting manner, complete with occluded vowels, in 'Tecum principium', or Philippe Jaroussky's clipped, almost mechanical 'Virgam virtutis'. 'Blithe' and 'bouncy' were my immediate reactions to the opening chorus, ditto the ultra-rapid 'Gloria' and 'Et in saecula'. With a less than first-rate choir (soprano intonation can waver), the words don't seem to mean much. The so-slow 'Conquassabit' is simply tame. For all its incidental attractions, this Gallic take on *Dixit* is ultimately too lightweight.

The sole available Italian version, directed by **Alessandro De Marchi**, is immediately hampered by an absurdly prominent harpsichord (whose jangling



Handel was just 21 when, in 1706, he set off for Rome; by April 1707 he had composed *Dixit Dominus*

repeated chords kill 'De torrente') and a swimmy acoustic that blurs fast-moving lines. There is percussive energy to spare, though in his enthusiasm

De Marchi can rush the rhythms, as at 'non poenitebit eum'. His female singers, solo and choral, are better than the men. Roberta Invernizzi's intense, urgent

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

RECORDING DATE / ARTISTS	RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1965 Ch of King's Coll, Cambridge; ECO / Willcocks	EMI/Warner (S) ➔ 585454-2 (4/66 ^R)
1976/77 Monteverdi Ch & Orch / Gardiner	Erato (S) ② 2564 61953-0; (M) 2292 45136-2; Apex (S) 0927 48683-2 (3/78 ^R)
1986 Ch of King's Coll, Cambridge; ECO / Cleobury	Decca (B) ② 455 041-2DF2 (10/88 ^R)
1986 Stockholm Bach Ch; Drottningholm Baroque Ens / Öhrwall	BIS (F) BIS-CD322 (8/01); (F) BIS-CD1235
1987 Taverner Ch & Plyrs / Parrott	Virgin/Erato (M) 561579-2 (6/89 ^R)
1987 Ch & Orch of Westminster Abbey / Preston	DG (M) 478 5183GB (2/89 ^R)
1989 Sixteen / Christophers	Chandos (F) CHAN0517 (3/92)
1994 Scholars Baroque Ens	Naxos (B) 8 553208
1998 Monteverdi Ch; EBS / Gardiner	Philips (F) 462 597-2PH (12/01)
1998 Musiciens & Ch du Louvre / Minkowski	Archiv (F) 459 627-2AH (2/00)
2000 Dresden Chbr Ch; Dresden Baroque Orch / Rademann	Carus (F) CARUS83 149
2003 Balthasar Neumann Ch & Ens / Hengelbrock	DHM (M) 88697 56868-2 (A/04)
2006 Concert d'Astrée / Haïm	Virgin/Erato (F) 395241-2 (1/08)
2008 Vocalconsort Berlin; AAM Berlin / Creed	Harmonia Mundi (F) HMC90 2041 (11/09)
2008 Apollo's Fire / Sorrell	Avie (F) AV2270
2009 Sixteen / Christophers	Coro (F) COR16076 (11/09)
2011 Academia Montis Regalis / De Marchi	DHM (M) ➔ 88691 92604-2 (8/12)
2013 Nuova Musica / Bates	Harmonia Mundi (M) HMU80 7587 (5/13)
2013 Ch of The Queen's Coll, Oxford; Brook Street Band / Rees	Avie (F) AV2274 (A/13)
2015 Capella Reial de Catalunya; Concert des Nations / Savall	Alia Vox (F) AVSA9918 (1/17)
2017 Vox Luminis / Meunier	Alpha (F) ALPHA370 (2/18)
2018 Ottawa Bach Ch; Ens Caprice / Canton	ATMA Classique (F) ACD2 2790 (9/19 ^{US})

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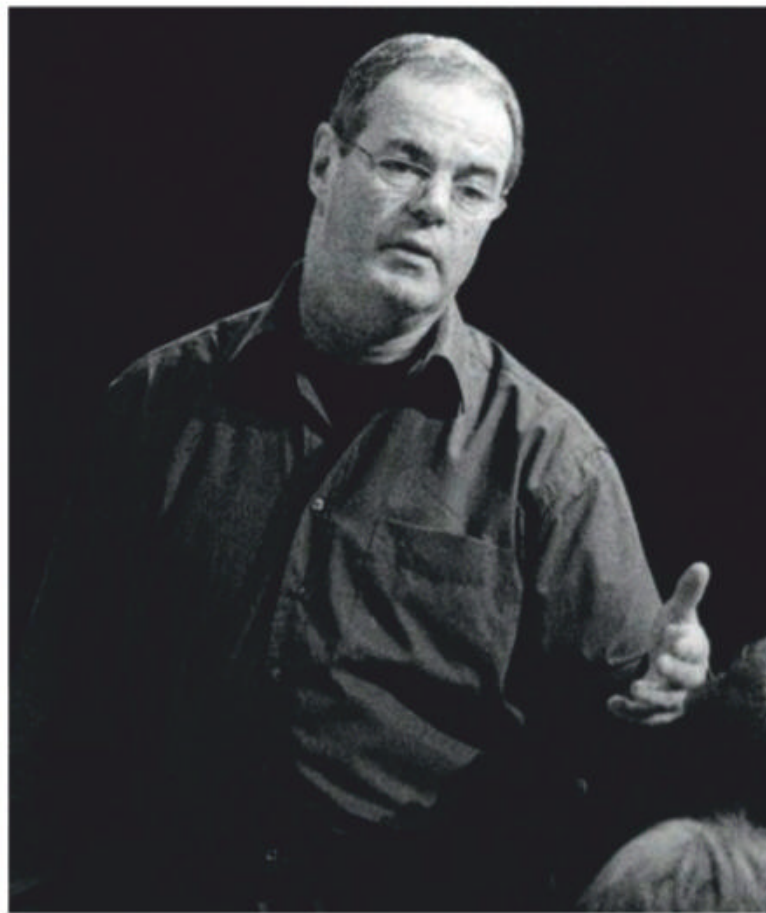
'Tecum principium' is a performance to make you sit up.

In his review of **Jordi Savall's** *Dixit* Lindsay Kemp commented on the 'general low energy' of the performance. I agree. While Savall cares for light and shade in the choral numbers, his approach is too easy-going. Crucially, the 20-strong choir suffers in the balance, with the tenors, especially, sounding undernourished. I don't care for the thin-toned countertenor in 'Virgam virtutis'. But the soprano soloists have an aptly pure, instrumental timbre and phrase expressively in 'De torrente'.

Far more to my taste is the performance by **Hans-Christoph Rademann** and his Dresden forces. With an excellent, firm-toned chorus and incisive playing from the period band, Rademann chooses relatively broad yet always vital tempos for the outer movements and 'Dominus a dextris tuis'. While 'Conquassabit' may initially seem implausibly slow, its gradual build to a massive climax powerfully conjures the inexorable onward march of the Lord's battalions. The two sopranos distil a seraphic innocence in 'De torrente'. Pleasure was slightly marred by a poorly tuned countertenor and (again) a hyperactive, forwardly recorded harpsichord, most intrusively in the chorus 'Tu es sacerdos'.

Crossing the Atlantic, **Jeanette Sorrell** directs the Cleveland-based Apollo's Fire in a neat, measured performance that never quite takes wing. With an over-emphatic bass line, rhythms too often trudge. The use of choral sopranos in 'De torrente' – why? – alone rules this version out. Conversely, the Montreal-based Ensemble Caprice under **Lisette Canton** positively scamper through the score. A choir of 20 plus solo strings inevitably skews Handel's balance. Canton seems determined to outpace all comers in the opening movement; and though soloists and chorus cling on, it sounds garbled, even more so in the boomy acoustic. 'Implebit ruinas' here seems almost indecently flippant.

More satisfying, if hardly revelatory, is the version from the Brook Street Band conducted by **Owen Rees**. The Queen's College chorus sing with appealingly fresh, bright tone (effortless soprano top As and B flats), and Rees uses dynamics sensitively. There's a good team of soloists. As David Vickers suggested in his original review, Sally Bruce-Payne, a strong, steady contralto, and cellist Tatty Theo make 'Virgam virtutis' an intimate contrapuntal dialogue. But agreeable as it is, the performance is underpowered, in part because 10 players struggle to supply



Marcus Creed oversees a weighty choral sound in Berlin

sufficient instrumental ballast. And the Oxford undergraduates sound simply too innocent for the carnage of 'ruinas' and 'Conquassabit'.

THE FINAL CUT

'You can't do *Dixit* with a skinny choral sound.' Using only 15 hand-picked singers, **David Bates** is true to his word in his recording with La Nuova Musica. Helped by a forward recording, the choir has few rivals for colour, agility and sheer presence. Driven by a fiercely propulsive continuo, the opening and closing choruses balance gravitas with an exciting cumulative intensity (the high tenor entry near the end is a moment to savour). 'Vengeance is mine, and I will repay', thunders the God of the Old Testament. Bates and his singers make the point, whether in the stabbing staccatos of 'Juravit Dominus' or the brutal *marcato* tread of 'Conquassabit'. With double-dotting and added choral trills, Bates transforms 'Judicabit', provocatively, into a French Baroque overture. Added sighing appoggiaturas make 'De torrente', tenderly sung by Anna Dennis and Augusta Hebbert, softer and arguably more sensuous than usual.

Looking at the numbers on the recording by **Lionel Meunier's** Vox Luminis – 10 singers and a band of 13 – I feared the choral sound would indeed be 'skinny'. Happily, Meunier and his accomplices proved me wrong. Keen, sometimes abrasive attack, intelligently varied dynamics and perfect contrapuntal clarity, not least in the excited chatter of 'Tu es sacerdos', compensate for any

loss of weight. 'Conquassabit' is fast and punchy, with the singers drilling into their consonants. Emerging naturally from the ensemble in the opening chorus, the soloists all have clear, fresh voices. 'De torrente' is touching in its purity and restraint. Without underplaying the momentous issues at stake, the whole performance is imbued with the spirit of the dance.

Meunier would be high on my *Dixit* shortlist, as would Hengelbrock, Minkowski and Christophers, 2009 vintage. Among older recordings, Parrott and, especially, Preston still pack a formidable punch. But the performance that excited me most – and visceral excitement is surely of the essence here – pairs a British conductor and a crack

German choir and orchestra: **Marcus Creed** and the Berlin Vokalconsort and Akademie für Alte Musik.

From the opening ritornello, violins sparring edgily with each other over a percussive continuo, the performance thrillingly catches the music's coursing, primal energy. 'Elemental' was my initial reaction, and I stick to it. The choral sound, both weighty and brilliant, opens up gloriously at climaxes. And the singers mean every word. The soprano soloists vie in their urgent delivery of the dire prophecy of 'Dominus a dextris tuis'. The chorus burn into the excruciating dissonances of 'Juravit Dominus' and spurt forwards with sadistic glee at 'implebit ruinas', before delivering the most terrifying 'Conquassabit' on disc. Andreas Scholl, at his peak, sings an ethereal, musing 'Virgam virtutis'. An incandescent 'Gloria', with the choir performing feats of virtuosity at speed, sets the seal on a recording that presents this supreme masterpiece of Handel's youth in all its flamboyant, daring theatricality. **G**

THE ULTIMATE CHOICE

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Metropolitan Opera, New York & cinemas worldwide

February 29

It's an all-star cast for this new production by Sir David McVicar of Handel's *Agrippina*, which we're told 'ingeniously reframes the action of this black comedy about the abuse of power to "the present"'. **Joyce DiDonato** assumes the title role as the power-hungry queen, while **Kate Lindsey** sings her son Nerone, the future emperor. **Brenda Rae** is Poppea, **Iestyn Davies** is Ottone, and **Matthew Rose** is Claudio.

Harry Bicket conducts.

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Philharmonie, Berlin & Digital Concert Hall

February 29, March 7 & 14

Yannick Nézet-Séguin conducts the first of the Berlin Philharmonic's live-streams this month, in a one-work concert devoted to Mahler's Symphony No 3 with mezzo-soprano soloist **Elina Garanča**, the women of the **Rundfunkchors Berlin**, and the boys of the **Berlin State and Cathedral Choir**. The second two are then both conducted by the orchestra's former Chief Conductor, **Sir Simon Rattle**, beginning with Rattle's major Beethoven 250 project, the rarely heard oratorio *Christ on the Mount of Olives*, with soloists Iwona Sobotka, Benjamin Bruns and David Soar with the **Rundfunkchor Berlin**. This is paired with Richard Strauss's Oboe Concerto with soloist **Jonathan Kelly**. The following weekend Rattle and the orchestra are then joined by the **Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart** for Berlioz's *Sinfonia* paired with Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra. digitalconcerthall.com

Konzerthaus Dortmund & Takt1

February 29

Takemitsu's 1991 tone poem *How Slow the Wind* opens this Dortmund appearance by the **NHK Symphony Orchestra** under its Principal Conductor **Paavo Järvi**, before former *Gramophone* Young Artist of the Year **Sol Gabetta** joins them as soloist for Schumann's Cello Concerto. The concert then concludes with Bruckner's Symphony No 7 (London audiences can catch the concert at the Royal Festival Hall on February 24).

konzerthaus-dortmund.ge; takt1.com

Concertgebouw, Amsterdam & online (free to view)

March 1

This month's live-streamed concert from the

ARCHIVE OPERA REVIEW

Barry Kosky resuscitates Jaromír Weinberger's operetta *Spring Storms*



Weinberger

Despite the loss of the full score and the orchestral parts, a revival of Jaromír Weinberger's abruptly censored *Spring Storms* (his follow-up to the international triumph *Schwanda the Bagpiper*) has been crafted by Norbert Biermann and the Komische Oper's Artistic Director Barrie Kosky from a piano reduction and some 1930s recordings.

The work – set mostly in Manchuria with a quick flip back to San Remo for the Act 3 peace conference – is a spiky, often quite surreal, send-up of the Russian Army's distractions by love and espionage in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904/5. It shows Weinberger in good shape and pretty much inventing a new form of operetta on the spot. A virtuoso dance troupe (of girls) replaces the expected chorus and one of the main roles, Russian General Katschalow (Stefan Kurt),

is entirely spoken – surely innovations to match the contemporary success of 'talkies' movies.

The big musical hit is not so much the Act 3 Lied for Japanese lover and spy Ito (the Richard Tauber part, here Tansel Akzeybeck) but the lengthy Act 2 duet 'Traumversunken' for Ito and his hoped-for lover Russian widow Lydia Pawlowska (Vera-Lotte Boecker). Like the Valenciennes pavilion scene in *The Merry Widow* it's a delicious sounding parade of harmonic inversions and near climaxes with an aptly sensual contribution from Otto Pichler's choreography. Almost the biggest joy here is how fluently the present Berlin company pick up the old style of operetta performance – dance, dialogue and song all dovetailing to perfection.

Mike Ashman

Available to watch for free at operavision.eu until July 24, 2020

Concertgebouw is given by the **Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra** under its new Chief Conductor, **Karina Canellakis**. Beethoven's *Egmont* Overture opens the programme, followed by Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No 1 with **Simone Lamsma**. They then conclude with Richard Strauss's *Tod und Verklärung*.

concertgebouw.nl

Wiener Konzerthaus and Takt1

March 3

The **Vienna Symphony Orchestra** under **Lahav Shani** present a two-work, all-Russian programme here, opening with Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No 3 featuring **Martha Argerich**. Rachmaninov's Symphonic Dances then follow.

konzerthaus.at; takt1.com

Duke's Hall, Royal Academy of Music & Facebook (free to view)

March 6

A chance to hear the RAM's Academy Chamber Orchestra in action, this lunchtime concert – live-streamed on the Academy's Facebook page – has them under the baton of their Principal Guest Conductor **Trevor Pinnock** in a programme pairing Ravel's *Le tombeau de Couperin* with Mozart's final Symphony, No 41, *Jupiter*.

facebook.com/royalacademyofmusic/

Orchestra Hall, Detroit & online (free to view)

March 7 & 13

The first of the **Detroit Symphony Orchestra's** live-streams this month is its annual celebration of African-American contributions to classical music. Conducted by former DSO

Resident Conductor **Thomas Wilkins**, it features **André Watts** in Beethoven's *Emperor* Piano Concerto, No 5, plus a new work based on the history of Detroit's Black Bottom Neighborhood by Nkeiru Ovoke, which draws inspiration from everything from Broadway to gospel to Schoenberg. The second concert is then a complete contrast: **Leonard Slatkin** conducting Orff's *Carmina Burana*. Preceding the Orff is the mysterious-sounding *Yet Another Set of Variations* (on a theme of Paganini) by various composers.
livefromorchestrahall.vhx.tv

Wigmore Hall, London & online (free to view) **March 8, 11 & 22**

Wigmore Hall has some great live-streams on its website this month, beginning with a programme of Fauré, Tchaikovsky and Schumann given by baritone **Stéphane Degout** with **Simon Lepper** at the piano. Next up is a Beethoven programme from the violinist **Daniel Sepec**, viola player **Tabea Zimmermann** and cellist **Jean-Guihen Queyras**. The final one then sees countertenor **Iestyn Davies** and lutenist **Thomas Dunford** present the works of Purcell's *Orpheus Britannicus* within the context of music by his musical predecessors and descendants including Dowland, Marais and Handel.
wigmore-hall.org.uk/watch-listen/live-stream

Finnish National Opera and Ballet, online & OperaVision (free to view)

March 11
Mozart's *Don Giovanni* appears at Finnish National Opera this month in a brand-new interpretation by the Finnish actor and director **Jussi Nikkilä** which promises 'a fascinating

fusion on modern and rococo styles' while focusing on the opera's interpersonal relations and their dynamics. **Patrick Fournillier** conducts **Tuomas Pursio** as Don Giovanni, **Liine Carlsson** as Donna Anna, **Koiti Soasepp** as The Commandant, **Tamuna Gochashvili** as Donna Elvira, **Tuomas Katajala** as Don Ottavio, **Markus Suihkonen** as Leporello, **Henri Uusitalo** as Masetto and **Olga Heikkilä** as Zerlina. Catch the live stream either on Finnish National Opera's own website or on Operavision.
oopperabaletti.fi; operavision.eu

Metropolitan Opera, New York & cinemas worldwide

March 14
The second of the Met's cinema screenings this month is a new production of Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer* by François Girard, with oil painting-esque sets by John Macfarlane. Singing the title role is **Sir Bryn Terfel**, in what is his first return to the Met's stage since 2012. He's joined by **Anja Kampe** making her Met debut as Senta, while **Franz-Josef Selig** is his father Daland and **Sergey Skorokhodov** her former lover Erik. **Valery Gergiev** conducts.
metopera.org/season/in-cinemas

TivoliVrendenburg, Utrecht & online (free to view)

March 16-28
This year's International Franz Liszt Piano Competition celebrates Beethoven 250 with its first ever themed edition: 'Beethoven seen through the eyes of Liszt', with **Idil Biret** and **Leslie Howard** among its judges. Catch its mix of solo, chamber and orchestral rounds either on the competition website or on its YouTube

and Facebook pages. Three finalists will be joined by the **Netherlands Radio PO**.
liszt.nl; facebook.com/Liszt.Competition; youtube.com/lisztcompetition

Royal Opera House, London & cinemas worldwide

March 17
A major Beethoven 250 London offering is the Royal Opera House's new production by Tobias Kratzer of *Fidelio*. Billed as a staging which 'brings together the dark reality of the French revolutionary "Terror" and our own time', it is conducted by **Sir Antonio Pappano**, starring **Jonas Kaufmann** as political prisoner Florestan, joined by **Lise Davidsen** making her role debut as his loyal wife Leonore.
roh.org.uk/showings

Barbican Hall, London, Takt1 & later on Stingray Classica

March 19
One of our must-sees this month, this concert from the **London Symphony Orchestra** under their Principal Guest Conductor **François-Xavier Roth** sees Roth exploring his fascination for Bartók via two of the Hungarian composer's folk-inspired works: the Dance Suite and the pantomime ballet, *The Wooden Prince*. Nestled between those two is Isabelle Faust performing Stravinsky's Violin Concerto. Plus, if you can't catch the live stream on Takt1, the LSO have just begun a partnership with the streaming service Stingray Classica, who have launched an app where you can stream concerts on demand; 30 or so LSO concerts are already up, and henceforth every streamed LSO concert will arrive on the app for on-demand viewing a couple of months later.
iso.co.uk; takt1.com

ARCHIVE CONCERT REVIEW

The Danish Radio archives offer up some real gems, including a concert by Kirill Kondrashin and Amalie Malling



Mozart • Mahler

The Danish radio equivalent of Rob Cowan's *Replay* stores its broadcasts for around six months in a corner of its site. The shiniest pearls are home-grown, among them guest appearances by Kurt Sanderling (Beethoven's Fourth Symphony) and Herbert Blomstedt

(*The Creation*) with the Danish RSO – and a thrilling, seat-of-the-pants concert of Mozart and Mahler conducted in March 1975 by Kirill Kondrashin.

The soloist in K491 was a local favourite, Amalie Malling, who shares her memories of the occasion (non-Danish speakers can skip the first 15 minutes). The concerto is new to the Kondrashin discography, but it moves with a typically smooth, taut and propulsive action, like a sprinter on his heels. Malling's response is more reflective, rhythmically a little strait-laced but responding in lively fashion to the woodwind lines coaxed out by the conductor.

Kondrashin's Mahler Fifth is more of a known quantity – swift and songful,

curbing the symphony's tendencies towards scherzoid meandering, with a tender and modest *Adagietto* at its heart – though evidently less so to the DRSO players. They settle down after some hair-raising passages in the funeral march, and the long cello-section solo in the second movement builds momentum towards the symphony's one true (if unorthodox) climax, unerringly placed by Kondrashin. The finale survives some more brass pile-ups to cross the line with a Tchaikovskian spirit of defiance in the face of adversity. The performance, and the site, are well worth sampling. **Peter Quantrill**

www.dr.dk/radio/p2/p2-guldkoncerten-p2d/p2-guldkoncerten-kirill-kondrasjin-og-amalie-malling

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THIS MONTH

A simple but effective network player, a fine pair of noise-cancelling headphones – and do you really need a stack of boxes?

Andrew Everard, Audio Editor

MARCH TEST DISCS



An unusual album, combining electric violin and theremin, but the soundscape on this Artes Mirables set is enveloping and intriguing.



This recording of Mayr's 1681 antiphons by Ars Antiqua Austria on Challenge Classics has a wonderful sense of space and thrilling ambience.

Arrivals, acquisitions and associations

New services on familiar products and a touch of Formula 1 engineering to wear wherever you are



Such is the competition in the audio market that products are often announced well in advance of availability and companies are keen to bring to their new arrivals a hint of exclusivity. That's definitely the case with La Sphère **1**, the flagship speaker from the French manufacturer Cabasse: it's just made its UK debut in the new technology section of Harrods, London's exclusive department store.

Developed in association with the designer and architect Sylvain Dubuisson, La Sphère uses a 70cm spherical enclosure on a helical die-cast aluminium base and stands an imposing 1.4m tall. It uses a 'tri-coaxial' main driver and a 55cm woofer to create a four-driver 'point source' array, with crossover and time-alignment controlled digitally. Selling for £197,500 a pair, the speaker is being marketed as a complete package, including a network player, 4800W of amplifiers and a digital signal processor, all from Cabasse, a Parasound pre-amp and cabling from Kimber Cable and Russ Andrews, with all the electronics on a Quadraspire rack. Delivery and installation come with the services of a Cabasse acoustician, who will ensure the system is set up for the best possible sound.

Just as striking-looking, though on a somewhat smaller scale, is the iFi Aurora **2**, which has now arrived in the shops following its launch early in 2019. The £1399 system has a main enclosure finished with multiple bamboo fins, supported on an integrated aluminium stand, designer Julien Haziza saying the style was inspired by the architecture in Tokyo's fashionable Omotesandō and Harajuku districts. The Aurora can play music at up to 192kHz/32-bit from network audio stores and has Bluetooth customised by iFi, AirPlay and Spotify Connect built in. Several Auroras can be connected together to make a multiroom set-up and the system uses four 13cm drivers, two silk-dome 28mm tweeters and a pair of downwards-firing auxiliary bass radiators. Automatic Room Tailoring uses six ultrasonic sensors to measure the distance to the surrounding walls before a 32-bit microprocessor adjusts the output from the drivers to optimise the performance.

Associations are nothing new, but the latest is between loudspeaker/headphone company Klipsch and the McLaren F1 team. The three-strong Klipsch x McLaren range **3** will launch later this

year, and combines the latest design and technology with hi-tech materials and a colour scheme featuring splashes of the F1 team's signature Papaya Orange. The T10 true wireless earphones are said to be the smallest and lightest of their kind and use the balanced armature driver found in the company's X10i model, gesture control and an exclusive turbo boost mode. They also have the dual-microphone noise cancellation found in the Over-Ear ANC headphone model, which also features 30-hour battery life, while the T5 Sport True Wireless earphones are designed to be completely dust- and waterproof, and come with no-budge wings to ensure they stay in place in the user's ears. UK prices for the new models are yet to be announced.

The music storage company Melco has announced a new EX range **4**, adding to the specification its Melco Intelligent Music Library software, which combines SongKong and MinimServer2 technologies to improve the tagging and search of stored music. Among other features this includes automatic composer tagging and the treatment of music as works, not albums, allowing easier access to works from discs combining music from different composers and ensembles. The range starts with the £1999 N100-H20 and extends to the flagship HA-N1Z/2EX-S40 at £9999, which has also gained an increase in internal SSD storage capacity to 4TB. Existing Melco models can be upgraded to EX status for a cost of between £175 and £350 to cover software licensing, labour and shipping, while the most recent models, the N10 and N100, will auto-update online to the latest specification. The software can also be downloaded from the Melco website. **6**

● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Leema Elements Streamer

This no-frills network music player from the Welsh electronics company appeals as much for its simplicity as its mature, well-ordered sound

The growing popularity of computer-stored and streamed music has made possible a rethink of the way hi-fi components look and work. Given that music files can carry a lot more metadata information than CDs, and network players are most logically operated using an app running on a smartphone or tablet device, there's no need for the player to conform to the norms of hi-fi separates.

That means the units themselves can do without a display panel, as there's simply too much information on offer to be readable at a distance unless the display is made as large as that on, say, NAD's M10 all-in-one. As a result we've seen the likes of the Naim ND5 XS2 and Audiolab's 6000N Play arriving on the scene with a plain fascia.

There's no need for network players to conform to the norms of hi-fi separates

Taking things even further, network players don't even need to conform to the normal hi-fi dimensions: Pro-Ject's little Stream Box RS2 Ultra takes this to the extreme, at just 10.5cm square and 3.7cm tall. And while the Leema Elements streamer we have here isn't quite that small, standing 8.8cm tall and 22cm wide, it's still a very compact piece of equipment. It's an affordable one, too, selling for £1295. That pitches it midway between budget models such as the Audiolab and Pro-Ject, and the entry-level offerings from the likes of Naim.



LEEMA ELEMENTS STREAMER

Type Network Audio Player

Price £1295

Networking Ethernet, Wi-Fi

Outputs RCA/XLR line analogue, optical/coaxial digital

Inputs USB Type A

File formats PCM-based up to 192kHz/24-bit, DSD64/128

Dimensions (WxHxD) 22x8.8x34cm

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SUGGESTED PARTNERS

Some suggested additions to make the most of the Leema Elements ...

LENOVO TAB E10

A smartphone or tablet will be needed to control the Leema: a model like this Lenovo Tab E10 has a good-size screen and an affordable price.



SYNOLOGY DS-218J

Storing your music on a NAS will take the pressure off your computer: Synology's DS-218j is a popular first-time choice.



As with all the company's products, the Elements Streamer is hand-assembled at the company's factory in Welshpool, Powys, famously also making electronics for the dairy industry as well as automotive and other applications. It joins the other models in the Leema Elements range, which runs to pre-, power and integrated amplifiers, a CD player, a DAC and a phono stage for use with turntables, all in matching 22cm-wide casework constructed to a very high standard.

This is a simple unit but it's clearly been designed to do its job, and do it very well

Aside from Leema's striking logo and the name of the product, all the Elements Streamer has on its fascia is a power LED, while to the rear things are almost as simple. Twin Wi-Fi antennae are provided, with a WPS pairing button, along with a LAN port for Ethernet; the unit can also play direct from USB storage devices as well as making the contents of such storage visible for playback on other DLNA players on the network. Outputs are on a choice of RCA sockets or balanced XLRs, plus optical and coaxial digital.

The electronics here are based on the streaming section in Leema's Quasar integrated amp, which sells for £2995. This supports services including Deezer, Qobuz, Spotify Connect, Tidal and vTuner radio, while the unit can also play music from network computers, NAS drives and music servers using the DLNA/UPnP protocols. Control of the Elements streamer is via the free mConnect Play app, which is available for iOS and Android.

In common with quite a few current streaming products, the digital-to-analogue conversion here is in the hands of the excellent ESS 9018 'Sabre' DAC, which comes complete with 32-bit 'Hyperstream' architecture and proprietary jitter elimination. This enables the unit to handle music at up to 192kHz/24-bit and DSD128, which may seem modest when there are products out there that can handle 768kHz and DSD512 but will actually be more than adequate for most listeners' needs.


And that's about all there is, other than to note that the mConnect control app will also be adequate for most after a little familiarisation, even if it's not the slickest or most comprehensive music-streaming app on the market. It's never obstructive and was stable enough during the review period, but it can require a bit too much user juggling when switching from network playback to streaming music, for example.

PERFORMANCE

A little patience tends to go a long way when following up on product launches with requests for review samples but the Elements Streamer pushed new limits. First announced at the 2018 Bristol Show – yes, two years ago – it was officially launched at the end of November 2018 and the email finally offering a review sample arrived a year after that. Apparently that initial preview was followed by 'an extensive development and testing programme throughout 2018'; but the good news is that the compact Leema unit was well worth the wait, having an honesty and directness to its sound that's as much a tribute to the work put into the analogue engineering as it is a sign of the quality of the streaming/digital section.

This is a simple unit, with not a sniff of the Bluetooth or Airplay wireless connectivity found in many products of the kind, but it's clearly been designed to do its job, and do it very well. The warm, mellifluous presentation is flattering to less-than-perfect recordings but doesn't stint on the detail or impact when a high-quality digital file is fed to the Leema.

The bass in particular is big and generous but at the same time tightly controlled, whether with the scale of a full orchestra or the lower octaves of a piano. Even more striking is the Leema's ability to lay out focused, naturally scaled sound-stage pictures, from both streaming services and locally stored files. Even live concerts on Radio 3 and Classic FM sound atmospheric and involving, despite the relatively modest data-rates used.

The Elements Streamer may look a little basic and lack some of the extras found on rivals at this level but it's certainly capable of high standards of performance, and comes firmly recommended. 

Or you could try ...

Pro-Ject Stream Box S2 Ultra



The idea of the display-less network player, controlled by an app on a handheld device, is proving a popular one, simplifying products and saving money to spend on audio-related component quality. As an entry-level model, Pro-Ject's little Stream Box S2 Ultra manages to be affordable, flexible – with USB input as well as networking – and fine-sounding, too. For more information see project-audio.com.

Audiolab 6000N Play



If you'd like a more conventionally sized streaming component, look no further than Audiolab's 6000N Play, which matches the company's other 6000 Series products in its slimline casework. High-quality digital and analogue circuitry makes the most of the music and it's easy to use via the DTS Play-Fi app, which opens up both a wide range of streaming services and multiroom integration. Details at audiolab.co.uk.

Naim ND5 XS 2



Take a step up in price and quality, and you come to the junior model in Naim's network player range, the ND5 XS 2. While it lacks the big colour display and upgradability of the company's NDX 2 and ND555 models, it delivers an exciting, mature sound, all under the control of the company's excellent dedicated app. Find out more at naimaudio.com.

● REVIEW BOWERS & WILKINS PX7

Phones with finesse

B&W's latest headphone range further develops its in-house technology and the results are spectacular

For almost 45 years Bowers & Wilkins only made loudspeakers, designed and developed at its base in Worthing, Sussex, and at its famous research facility in Steyning. Then, a little over 10 years back, it branched out into a wider range of products, from the sleek Zeppelin range of active speaker systems for use with iPods and iPhones to a striking-looking range of skeletal headphones, designed for comfort as well as sound quality.

Developed and tuned by the same engineers responsible for the company's speaker range, which after all includes the several generations of its 800 Series used in studios worldwide, the headphone range has seen continuous development since it first appeared. While recent models have been recognisable descendants of the original designs, both the audio quality and the on-board technology have grown. Features such as Bluetooth wireless connectivity and noise cancellation have been added, and in-ear designs have joined the more conventional over-ear models.

The recent revamp of the company's headphone range brought an all-new line-up and a complete redesign of the over-ear models. The £169 PI3 entry-level in-ear model is a wireless 'neckband' design using tiny Hybrid Dual Driver technology: a balanced armature driver for the treble and a dynamic driver for the midband and bass, driven by separate amplifiers. Fast USB charging gives eight hours' play, plus a further two hours from a quick 15-minute top up, and the earphones are built using coated silicone and rubber for comfort and durability, with magnet earpieces that clip together when not in use.

The £269 PI4 takes the same thinking and adds enhanced drivers, earpieces designed for an even more secure fit and the company's adaptive noise-cancelling to keep outside sound away from the music. Meanwhile, larger battery capacity boosts usage to 10 hours, with three extra hours from a 15-minute quick charge.

The same price will also buy you the PX5 on-ear phones, again with noise cancelling but now with 25-hour battery life and a bigger, richer sound thanks to 35mm drivers. Plus there's a convenient remote control facility built in: lift one of the ear-cups to hear what's going on around

you and proximity sensors pause the music, resuming when the earpiece is replaced.

The flagship over-ear model we have here, the £349 PX7, shares the carbon fibre composite construction and facilities of the less expensive model but comes with larger earcups and drivers, giving enhanced passive noise-cancellation in addition to the active system and allowing better positioning of the 45mm drivers for more realistic sound-staging. The battery life is truly spectacular: the PX7 is good for 30 hours' listening, meaning it will last for even the longest flight on a single charge. You can also top up an extra five hours' use in just 15 minutes.

The PX7 comes with a fitted travel case, with a compartment for the USB-A-to-C charging cable, which can also carry audio from a computer to the headphones, and the auxiliary analogue audio cable, which can be used with devices only having this output (though the headphones will still need to be powered).

When the analogue connection is used, the PX7 gives a very good account of everything

The controls on the earcups are logically laid out, with operation becoming instinctive after just a few minutes' use. Voice messages make it easy to know which noise-cancelling mode you're using: these can be turned on and off using the B&W app on a phone or tablet, which will also let you customise other features such as the sensitivity of the wear sensor that pauses the music, the amount of sound pass-through in noise-cancelling mode and the automatic standby when you take the headphones off. You can also use the app to check for and upload software updates, and it has a number of built-in soundscapes, should you wish to drift off to waves lapping on a shore, forest sounds and so on. These effects come with a user-selectable timer.

The headband on the PX7 sits just forwards of the plane of the earcups, giving a comfortable but reliable fit, and indeed the headphones give an impressive amount of passive noise-cancellation even with the active electronics turned off. Whether used in transit or while sitting at my somewhat



BOWERS & WILKINS PX7

Type Wireless noise-cancelling headphones

Price £349

Inputs Bluetooth 5.0 with aptX, analogue audio on 3.5mm socket, digital audio on USB-C

Adaptive Noise Cancellation Three-stage, user-customisable

Microphone Four for noise-cancellation, two for telephony

Battery life between charges 30 hours with noise cancellation on, 15 min quick charge for 5 hours' extra use

Accessories supplied 3.5mm aux audio cable, USB-A-to-C charging/audio cable (both 1.2m long), carrying case

Weight 310g

bowerswilkins.com

clattery mechanical computer keyboard, I was impressed how well even very delicate music came through, while the noise cancellation just took the final hints of outside sound away, without any obvious effect on the quality of the music.

Too often I have found that such audio processing can make the music sound a bit – well, processed, but here the attractively rich yet closely detailed balance I have heard in other headphones from the company is maintained. And while the best results are heard when the analogue connection is used, thus removing the limitations of audio transmission via Bluetooth, there's no denying that, when connected to my iPhone and playing the files I usually listen to via Apple CarPlay when driving, the PX7 gives a very good account of everything, from John Wilson's first volume of works by Eric Coates (Chandos, 11/19) to Pedro Rojas-Ogáyar's set of Rodrigo guitar works on IBS. With the Coates, the finesse, elegance and exuberance of the playing is brought to life by the headphones, while the solo guitar recording is all about fine detail, the touch of finger on string and the way the notes decay into a credible, reverberant church acoustic.

These headphones are not just a technical tour de force – they might be among the best-sounding Bowers & Wilkins designs to date. **G**

● ESSAY

Has the simple system come of age?

Once there was a straight choice between convenience and performance, and between one-box elegance and 'proper hi-fi'. These days, the lines are rather more blurred ...

The question came out of the blue: a friend had come round to listen to a recording about which I'd been enthusing, and we were sitting enjoying it together. Yes, he agreed, the sound and performances were every bit as special as I'd suggested, but – slight pause for effect – 'What exactly do all those boxes do?' he asked, surveying my system.

The clever answer would have been that they produce the sound he'd just heard, but instead I heard myself saying 'Well, that's the network player with its separate power supply, that one's the pre-amplifier, again with its power supply, and that one's the power amplifier, while those are ...'

I trailed off: blank incomprehension had come over him, and again he asked, 'Yes, but what do they do?' before reminding me that what he used at home was a simple mini-system – CD player, amplifier and tuner in one little 'shoebox' – with a pair of compact speakers. I should have remembered: after all, I suggested it a handful of years ago when he'd asked me for a steer on something 'decent, but not too pricey'.

That system – one of the generations of Denon's DM- models – had surprised me at the time with its ability to drive speakers one would imagine to be well above its class, and this is a trait still upheld by its successors in that company's range and the M-CR models of stablemate Marantz. Any of them will happily work with compact speakers well beyond the entry level, and indeed, some of the Marantz models even have the option of bi-amplifying speakers of reasonable sensitivity or combining their amplification to power more demanding designs.

However, excellent though those little systems are – especially given their bargain pricing – to these ears they've never been a substitute for a full-size hi-fi system, and especially not for one costing many times their price. However, all that's been changing of late. Thanks to the rise of network and online streaming, there's now no shortage of compact 'just add speakers' systems more than capable of challenging a conventional stack of hi-fi separates.

I'm not suggesting such systems will always save you a huge amount of money over a traditional source/amplifier set-up but what they will save you is space, as well



NAD's Masters M10 may be tiny – just 21cm wide and 10cm tall – but it has the power and control to drive some very serious speakers. Is this the new face of hi-fi for the 2020s?



as looking much better in rooms with a 'clean' aesthetic than would a rack-full of 43cm-wide hi-fi components.

Arguably things began to change with the arrival, now more than a decade ago, of the original Naim Uniti which, with its built-in CD player, network playback and amplification, was very much the modern music centre of its day. The latest versions, with their enhanced network and online capabilities, sleeker looks and big, sharp colour display, bring the concept bang up to date and, in the smallest Uniti model, the Atom, present the all-in-one music system in a remarkably compact version.

Things began to change with the arrival of the original Naim Uniti – the modern music centre of its day

I've heard some very plausible demonstrations with the current generation of Uniti driving large floorstanding speakers, and indeed have done plenty of listening with such combinations in my own home. Provided you don't need massive volume levels, even the little Atom will work well with some of the more affordable floorstanding speakers from stablemate Focal. It will also match well with the likes of the Bowers & Wilkins 600 Series or the very affordable Wharfedale Diamond and D300 speakers.

I even know of some users who are running the little Atom as a compact front end for a full-size Naim power amp, giving it greater oomph to drive larger speakers,

thanks to its rear-panel pre-amplifier output. This has the advantage that the power amplifier can be hidden away somewhere if you wish, leaving just the main unit on display. Or indeed you could make full use of the Naim control app on a phone or tablet and have the entire system hidden away.

I've heard equally good things about the similarly sized Linn Selekt DSM, which can be had in a pre-amp version or complete with built-in power amplification, although I haven't yet had the opportunity to hear it in my own system. That system can also now be had with optional surround-sound processing built in, and even with multichannel power amps on board, making it an extremely stylish way to set up a full home-cinema system.

However, the system that really seems to be capturing a lot of attention of late is NAD's variation on the Uniti Atom/Selekt DSM theme, the Masters M10. With all control via its big touchscreen display (or an app or optional remote handset), it's even more minimal in its design than its rivals, while its onboard HybridDigital nCore amplification lets it deliver 100W into an 8 ohm speaker load, and dynamic peaks of 180/300W into 8/4 ohms respectively. It really does offer that sense of effortless power: both in my own room and at various shows, I have now heard the NAD driving some very inappropriate speakers to exceptional effect, and were I to be drawing up my 'if I wasn't doing this for a living' list, it would definitely be a strong contender. **G**

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NOTES & LETTERS

Bruno Walter in rehearsal • A magnificent Alkan pianist • The Delius Sea Drift conductor

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Bruno Walter postscript

Sony Classical has certainly done the great German conductor Bruno Walter proud with the issue of his complete Columbia/CBS studio recordings from 1941 to 1961 (reviewed in December, page 124) and it is entirely fitting that they have included almost all of his preserved rehearsals prior to the actual recordings.

I say almost all because according to John McClure, who produced nearly all of Walter's stereo recordings from 1958 to 1961 stated in an interview with biographer Eryk Riding, the rehearsals for the Bruckner Ninth Symphony were also captured on tape. No lesser figure than Zubin Mehta, who attended some of the Californian sessions, recalled in a 2009 interview that 'the recording of the Bruckner Ninth is really a document that everybody should have'. How true.

Bruckner was still alive when Bruno Walter made his professional debut and surely these rehearsals would be of great importance to current and future maestros, great and small. I know that I – being assuredly near the foot of the latter category – have learnt a huge amount from studying the published Beethoven, Mahler, Mozart and Wagner rehearsals.

Perhaps Sony Classical would consider issuing a two-disc set comprising both rehearsal and finished performance. There might also be space for a little more of the Mahler Ninth rehearsals, of which only a tantalising few minutes have ever been issued. After all, Walter conducted the world premiere of that work!

Neil Mantle

via email

Alkan pianists

In his review of Paul Wee's Alkan Concerto/Symphony recording (November, page 66), Jeremy Nicholas listed the usual suspects of Alkan recording artists, but did not mention Yui Morishita from Japan. He has, since 2015, recorded five excellent Alkan albums for the ALM label (widely available to stream and download). Repertoire includes all of the Op 39 *Études* and, to my knowledge, the only recording of *Scherzo-focoso*, Op 34, a fearsome piece that even Ronald Smith, in his book, deferred to a future pianist to tackle. A live YouTube performance is also available. I urge *Gramophone's* future

Letter of the Month

The conductor of the Decca Sea Drift

The conductor of the Decca *Sea Drift* recorded at the Chenil Galleries, Chelsea on May 29, 1929 (reviewed by Peter Quantrill, January page 98) was Anthony Bernard, as the soloist Roy Henderson made clear when I interviewed him at his home in August 1986 and when he spoke to the Delius Society in April 1989.

Bernard's name was not printed on the label of the 78s when they were released, probably because at that time he was also recording for Brunswick, in particular Delius's *North Country Sketches*. In June 1929 Delius's wife Jelka wrote to Philip Heseltine, asking him to tell Bernard (who had visited Delius at Grez in March) that 'Fred wants so very much to hear his records of N. C. Sketches and Seadrift [sic] as soon as possible'. Unfortunately *North Country Sketches* was never released 'owing to mechanical defects', but in August Jelka wrote to Heseltine, 'We greatly enjoyed Bernards Seadrift on our own Gram. We first heard it thro wireless [Daventry, July 29, 1929], which was rather bad.' When Heseltine had heard the records he wrote to Delius that he



Delius, who set the poetry of Whitman in Sea Drift

was 'agreeably surprised. There are bad patches here and there, but on the whole the recording is much better than I had expected. Bernard's tempi are rather odd in certain sections – the opening is surely about twice too slow?'

Stephen Lloyd

Luton, Bedfordshire

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reviewers to include Morishita in the pantheon of fine Alkan players.

Danny Goodman

El Granada, CA, USA

Jeremy Nicholas writes: I should indeed have added the amazing Yui Morishita to the select number of those who have recorded both the Alkan Symphony and Concerto (the latter on ALMCD-7203; the Symphony on ALMCD-7193); and also Stefan Lindgren (Concerto on

SR Records SRCD2028 recorded live; Symphony on Daphne 1034).

Editorial note

In the Icons article on Hans Swarowsky (January, page 62), the 'defining moment' for 1912 had him singing in the children's chorus at the premiere of Mahler's Eighth Symphony under the direction of the composer (who died in 1911). The work was actually premiered in 1910 – with, indeed, the composer conducting.

OBITUARIES

A major American pianist and characterful bass-baritone

PETER SERKIN

Pianist

Born July 24, 1947

Died February 1, 2020



The American pianist, who has died at the age of 72, had an exceptional musical pedigree: his father was the pianist Rudolf Serkin and his maternal grandfather

the violinist and conductor Adolf Busch. His musical sympathies were broad, and though he played a huge amount of contemporary music he never liked to be referred to as a new music 'champion', he merely felt playing the music of his time part of his role as a musician.

He entered the Curtis Institute in 1958, aged 11, and studied with Mieczysław Horszowski, Lee Luvisi and his own father. He made his debut the following year at the Malboro Music Festival which led to major engagements with top-flight orchestras and conductors like the Cleveland and George Szell and the Philadelphia and Eugene Ormandy.

In 1968, aged 21, Serkin took a break from music, moving with his wife and young child to Mexico. It was apparently hearing the music of JS Bach on a neighbour's radio that convinced him of his need to play again. He returned and continued a major career which also included, in 1973, forming the chamber group Tashi (with Ida Kavafian, violin, Fred Sherry, cello, and Richard Stoltzman, clarinet), initially assembled to play Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time* (which they performed over 100 times and recorded in 1975).

Serkin's repertoire ranged from Bach's *Goldberg Variations* (which he recorded five times, the first at 18 and the last at 70) to modern works written especially for him by major composers including Carter, Henze, Berio, Lieberson, Knussen, Goehr, Takemitsu and Wuorinen.

He recorded extensively for RCA, and among his finest releases were Messiaen's *Vingt regards sur l'enfant Jésus* ('Messiaen's harmonic colours take on a luminous quality under his fingers, the rhythmic ostinati are imperiously compelling; the dynamic range, immense, yet always within musical bounds; the total effect, overwhelming', wrote Felix Aprahamian in *Gramophone's* December 1976 issue),

a Takemitsu programme, an album of six Mozart piano concertos with the ECO and Alexander Schneider and the Brahms violin sonatas with Pamela Frank (for Decca). Serkin was unusual among top-flight pianists in playing on both modern and period instruments, using a Graf fortepiano to record the last six Beethoven piano sonatas (Pro Arte, now on Musical Concepts).

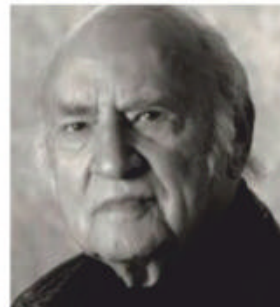
Serkin taught at Curtis, Juilliard, Yale and latterly at Bard College in upstate New York near where he lived.

FRANZ MAZURA

Bass-baritone

Born April 22, 1924

January 23, 2020



Noted as a fine singing-actor, Mazura sang the dual-role of Dr Schön and Jack the Ripper in the premiere of Friedrich Cerha's completion

of Alban Berg's *Lulu* at the Opéra de Paris under Pierre Boulez (the DG live recording of which won *Gramophone's* Opera Award in 1980). Reviewing a CD reissue of the opera, Richard Whitehouse commented that 'Franz Mazura is a properly hollow Schön, whose seeming authority gives way to a blackly humorous vulnerability prior to his death'.

Born in Salzburg, Mazura initially studied mechanical engineering, then after serving in the military during the war, he studied singing in Detmold, making his stage debut in Kassel in 1949. He then sang at many German houses before joining Berlin's Deutsche Oper in 1963.

He tended to be cast as villains or outsiders, and his large repertoire included Jochanaan (*Salome*), Alberich and Gunther (*Ring*), Scarpia (*Tosca*), Pizarro (*Fidelio*), Count Waldner (*Arabella*), Doctor (*Wozzeck*) and Creon (*Oedipus Rex*). Among his many recordings are the Boulez/Bayreuth *Ring* (Philips), *Moses und Aron* for Solti (Decca), *Der Lautsprecher* in Viktor Ullmann's *Der Kaiser von Atlantis* (Decca) and Klingsor in *Parsifal* under Levine at the Met (DG).

His long career closed the day before his 95th birthday when he sang Meister Hans Schwarz in Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* at the Staatsoper Berlin.



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Gramophone's Editor travelled to Reykjavík to watch the Icelandic pianist – and our current Artist of the Year – record Rameau and Debussy for DG

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Lüdig		Chacony, Z730	59	Sigh, sedges, sigh, Op 36 No 4	84	Un ballo in maschera – Morrò, ma prima in grazia	94
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Mahler		Timon of Athens – Curtain Tune on a Ground	59	Oceans	49	Macbeth – Una macchia è qui tuttora; Nel dì della vittoria io le incontrai ... Vieni! T’affretta! Accendere ... Or tutti sorgete	94
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Malloy		Six Songs, Op 38	84	Smirnov		La traviata – È strano! ... Ah, forse è lui ... Sempre libera	94
Octet	79	Variations on a Theme of Corelli, Op 42	66	Tiriël, Op 41c	57	Il trovatore – Ne’ tornei! V’apparve ... Tacea la notte placida	94
Marini		Ravel		C Stamitz		I vespri siciliani – Arrigo! ah! parli a un core; Mercé, dilette amiche	94
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Warnung vor dem Rhein, WoO16	83			Lob des Leidens, Op 15 No 3	80		
Merula				Mädchenblumen, Op 22	80		
Hor ch’è tempo di dormire	84			Malven	80		
				Vier letzte Lieder	80		

Daniel Hope

The violinist and Music Director of the Zurich Chamber Orchestra is also Honorary President of the Beethovenhaus in Bonn

Beethoven cropped up for me very early on because of my mentor Yehudi Menuhin and the Violin Concerto which he constantly played. The first conscious experience I have of him playing it was in Gstaad with the Zurich Chamber Orchestra. Later, as a boy of about eight, I remember going to the Wigmore Hall and hearing the Beaux Arts Trio playing the *Archduke* and the Guarneri Quartet playing Op 18 No 1. There's something about the chamber music which I found so radical, especially played by those gents. So when I think about my first encounters with Beethoven's music, it becomes an amalgamation of those early experiences.

The symbolism of Menuhin's 1953 recording of the Violin Concerto with Wilhelm Furtwängler conducting is immensely potent: Jewish soloist, German conductor tainted with Nazism. The most extraordinary thing about that collaboration is that they'd never met. Menuhin put himself on the line for someone he didn't really know, yet was convinced this was about German culture and not about German crime – and that a distinction had to be made. Every time we played together in Germany, someone would come up to Yehudi at the end: 'You brought music back to us again' or 'You came back to us with Beethoven and Mendelssohn'. When one listens to the recording, knowing all of that, you feel all the more strongly about it. Not to mention the glorious musicianship!

Many years later, when I was a member of the Beaux Arts Trio myself, we had a two-hour coaching session with György Kurtág, who worked with us on Beethoven's Op 70 No 2 Trio at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam. It was absolutely extraordinary because he reset everything we'd always thought about Beethoven – including Menahem Pressler, who must have played the piece a few thousand times. Kurtág distilled Beethoven down to a few very basic words and expressions and it was revelatory for us because we found ourselves re-imaging the music. What makes Beethoven so fascinating from a musical point of view is his chameleon-like character: just when you think you've 'got' him, you're furthest away.

The Beethovenhaus Bonn houses the biggest collection of Beethoven in the world. There are 80 full-time music scholars who research Beethoven from morning to night. It's home to the largest collection of manuscripts of his works. And the person really responsible for creating the Beethovenhaus was its first President, Joseph Joachim, for me one of the most important violinists and musicians of all time. Joachim said we cannot allow this house in which Beethoven was born to disappear. It must become a centre for Beethoven research and studies forever.

Joachim was a great champion of Beethoven's music: his own string quartet has an interesting connection. The second



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violinist of the quartet, which came often to London, was a German called Ernst Schiever and he played the 'Ex-Lipinski' Guarneri del Gesù on which I now play.

Important Beethoven recordings for me? The Triple Concerto with David Oistrakh, Rostropovich, Richter and Karajan. Even more so knowing they didn't get on at all! But if you grow up with a recording, and you know it backwards, it stays with you whatever the history or the truth behind it. It's so inside of me, that recording. The same goes for the Violin Concerto with Pinchas Zukerman and Daniel Barenboim. I grew up with that recording; in fact I made my dad play the Deutsche Grammophon cassette every single night for me to go to sleep! I would also say the 1962 Beethoven cycle with Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic, and the piano trios with the Beaux Arts – I think I went through probably three different box sets as I literally wore the LPs out! The *Kreutzer* Sonata – two versions – Oistrakh and Lev Oborin was one, and the other was Rubinstein and Henryk Szeryng. And then there's an extraordinary recording of the *Archduke* with Menuhin, Kempff and Fournier. Said with the greatest respect, it seems a little haphazard, and yet there are elements of expression that are absolutely mind-blowing, especially the slow movement. And then I'd also have to include some of the folksongs with Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Rostropovich and Yehudi again. I've always had a soft spot for them, and some of them are truly gorgeous. **G**

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